

# Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil

Your local county voluntary council



VOLUNTARY ACTION  
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## 11. Campaigning and influencing

### 11.12 Campaigning and lobbying techniques

#### Overview

This information sheet should be read in conjunction with sheet *11.11 Planning a campaign*. The techniques you could use for your campaign should derive from the planning you have done beforehand. There is an enormous range of campaigning and lobbying techniques that you could consider using to further your campaign and we have grouped the techniques into four areas: the written word, using the media, mobilising your supporters and lobbying politicians.

#### 1. Using the Written Word

- Letter-writing
- Leaflets
- Postcards
- Posters
- Petitions

##### Letter-writing

This can be a good starting point for making initial contact with your campaign targets. Letters might seem a little slow and old fashioned in the age of new technology, but your target will have something to study and refer back to. It is also less likely to get swamped in the deluge of e mails that people receive every day, and because it is a physical entity it can be harder to ignore. It is also worth remembering that whilst cyber-campaigning can be cheap and has the potential to reach high volumes of people, the technology can also work against the campaigner as sophisticated filtering systems can identify and filter out e mails that are part of a larger “volume” effort.

Try to make your letter personal by addressing it personally, asking specific questions of the recipient and asking for their personal opinion. Again this means you will be more likely to receive a response from them rather than it simply being forwarded on to another person or department.

Getting other people to write too can be very powerful, but this can easily backfire if you are asking people to use a standard format. Encourage people to stick to the personalised letter principle as this will carry more weight than receiving huge volumes of exactly the same letter. Unlike a petition or a pre-printed postcard, a letter can explain how individuals are being affected.

Think about timing if you are encouraging other people to write. Is anything happening in the external environment that might dilute the effect of your letters? Also for greatest impact, try to ensure that your target receives letters within a short space of time - 25 letters in a fortnight will have a bigger impact than one a fortnight over several months. Other important things to remember about letter-writing include:

- Be succinct and focused - keep it to a page if possible and only cover one subject per letter
- Avoid ranting or rambling
- Only make two or three key points in your letter - better still ensure that your points include solutions
- Put all the important information in the first paragraph (who, why, what, where and when)
- Think about how to handle the supporting evidence that your letter may require so as not to overwhelm the recipient - perhaps summarise it on a separate sheet
- Thank recipients for their time and politely ask for a response

## **Leaflets**

Many campaign organisers think about designing, printing and distributing leaflets to inform people about their campaign and how to get involved. If you have the resources to do this, it is often a tempting activity, but it is worth spending some time thinking about how the leaflets will be used.

Doing a mass mailout of leaflets can be expensive and might not be all that effective. We are all generally busy and bombarded with information which makes a random leaflet easy to ignore - many end up unread in the recycling bin. Think about the number of times you have discarded leaflets without even reading them.

However, leaflets can be a useful back-up resource for other activities:

- If you're holding a public meeting, you might want to distribute leaflets at the meeting to remind people about the important issues and contact details for when they get home
- If you are doing door to door canvassing, a leaflet serves the same purpose
- If you have a street stall, a leaflet can give a useful focus for conversation as well as giving important issue and contact details.

Another positive feature is that designing a leaflet will force you to concentrate on the key messages of your campaign - to make sure they are short, catchy and understandable.

## **Postcard campaigns**

Many campaigns have taken an approach of pre-printing large numbers of postcards setting out the main messages and key asks of the campaign. Individuals are then simply urged to fill in the details of their relevant elected representative (Member of Parliament, or Assembly Member, or local councilor) and send it on to them.

There are some advantages and disadvantages of this type of activity which need to be considered. It can be a way of generating big numbers because it is a relatively simple thing that individuals can do to register their support for a particular campaign. Anything that generates big numbers is alleged to be a good thing because it is an indicator of the strength of feeling and support for an issue. However, they do not tend to carry the same weight as personalised messages and stories from individuals about how a service or policy or piece of legislation is affecting someone's life or their opportunities. Clearly, an extremely effective tactic is to generate high numbers of personalised stories, but this can be very difficult to achieve.

The other thing to bear in mind when you are carrying out a postcard campaign is to ensure that it is carried out over a short time period. The same thing applies here as to letter writing ie the impact of large volumes of postcards received over a 2 week period is much more effective than dribs and drabs coming in over a 6 month period. And of course, for any campaign activity, be sure about how it fits in with the timing and other activities you are planning in order to maximise the impact of your efforts.

## Poster campaigns

Posters can be high impact campaign tools. But there are a few things to think about if you want to get this right:

- Have you got the money/access to resources to get posters produced?
- Who are your posters aimed at
- Posters should have strong images/photographs and minimum text. These three are great examples of campaign posters:
  - Shelter, [www.bl.uk/learning/images/Campaign\\_MAI/posters/large92615.html](http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/Campaign_MAI/posters/large92615.html)
  - Barnados [www.bl.uk/learning/images/Campaign\\_MAI/posters/large92625.html](http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/Campaign_MAI/posters/large92625.html) and
  - Anti-Slavery International [www.bl.uk/learning/images/Campaign\\_MAI/posters/large92631.html](http://www.bl.uk/learning/images/Campaign_MAI/posters/large92631.html)
- Think about different sizes for different areas
- Try to position your posters near places where your target audience will see them
- Use large outdoor posters in high traffic areas, but remember that advertising space can be extremely expensive.
- Use posters in indoor public places. Depending on your poster's content and your target audience, you can place them schools, churches, post offices, community halls, hospitals, shopping centres, sports grounds, theatres and other buildings where the public gathers. Usually they have places reserved for displaying posters. Be sure to ask permission before placing your posters to avoid trouble. Usually, placing your poster is free but some places may charge you. Also, remember to take them down when the campaign moves on, both as a signal that the campaign is now over and also as a sign of respect for the administrators of that public place.

Posters can often tie in with leaflets in a co-ordinated way and can be extremely effective where the imagery is powerful - either shocking or controversial or sometimes even funny can work.

## **Petitions**

Collecting signatures for a petition can be a useful way of demonstrating how many people support your campaign. It does not have to be a resource intensive activity as petitions can simply be left in many different locations for people to sign. However it can be more effective to ask some of your supporters to actively look for signatures and this then gives an opportunity for your campaign aims and messages to be explained to people in more detail. You might be able to recruit some more activists to your cause by engaging people in a conversation about your campaign.

It is worth finding out about how your petition will be received by the institution at which it is aimed. Do they have a process for dealing with petitions? What is likely to happen to your hard work? Some institutions, like the National Assembly for Wales have a proper petitions process in place for which you only need 10 signatures, whilst others might have no process and put it straight in the bin. Where there is no recognised process, it can still be worth keeping up the pressure by following up your petition submission by enquiring about the institution's response. The media can often be persuaded to take an interest in petitions and might be prepared to cover your story and indeed to help you to maintain pressure for a response.

## **2. Using the media**

- General tips for working with the media
- Letters to the Editor
- TV and Radio Interviews
- Press Releases

Here we explore how to make the best of use of news and other associated outlets to advance your campaigning. This means you need to think about newspapers, television, radio, and maybe alternative media outlets such as the Independent Media Centre and Schnews. Also, don't forget to consider freesheets that are circulated in many areas as they can often be read more widely than a bigger newspaper. You will also need to consider new media, or social media campaigning or e campaigning as it is also known. This means using the internet (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube etc) as a campaign platform. We will develop a separate information sheet on social media in due course.

In terms of conventional media though, firstly, you need to get to know your local media and key contacts. Are there any particular columnists or shows that are relevant to your issue? If you don't know, then try to find out what interests particular journalists or editors. And if you have no idea where to start, then try the newsdesk - all news organisations will have a newsdesk where all incoming news is processed. However, it will probably be more fruitful in the long term to try to cultivate personal contacts with journalists and media professionals. They are busy people who are often responding to

tight deadlines - if you can make yourself useful to them, you are more likely to get your story covered. Also, be sure to find out about important things like deadlines for copy - they will be different for each media outlet.

Media planning is a key component of any campaign planning and your media strategy should be governed by the purpose of your campaign, your target audience(s), why you want to receive coverage on particular issues, and whether the media are likely to be interested. Just because you think your issue is important, it doesn't mean that the media will and you need to be objective about your assessment of whether the media will be interested. If not, it could be counter-productive to keep sending out press releases and get a reputation for time-wasting - your big story could end up being ignored because of previous tactics you've used.

When you're working with the media, you're only likely to interest them if what you've got to say is short and easily explained. This means keeping to no more than 3 key points in any media release or interview and each point should only need a sentence or two to explain it. Keep practicing until you can get this right - think about being stuck in a lift with the journalist and having only until the lift reaches the top floor to explain your story. Find ways to reinforce your message with a combination of soundbites, statistics, and stories about local people and try to repeat your message to get it across.

You also need to find the right angle for your message. Does it have strong local interest? Does it have drama or controversy? Does it have a strong story? Is it simple to understand? Does it relate to something else that is currently in the news? Is there a whiff of scandal? Is there an element of human interest? Can good pictures be generated?

## **Letters to the editor**

This can often be a good way to generate a discussion in your local press as letters page discussions often keep a topic alive for days and even weeks at a time. You might be trying to introduce your topic from a standing start, or responding to an article or letter that has been published previously. There are some general things to bear in mind when writing your letter, such as:

- Keep the readership in mind and make sure your points appeal to them in some way. Read the other letters to work out what sort of style tends to get published.
- Don't descend into ranting - plenty of other letters will do this, so be calm, rational and intelligent in your comments.
- However, occasionally you might need to inject either a bit of vitriol or humour for your letter stand out and make it to publication.
- Remember to make your key points and stick to them.
- If it's appropriate, try to get other notable signatories to your letter - it might carry more weight if a local celebrity puts their name to your letter.
- Include your name and address, even if you ask for these to be withheld, because some papers won't publish anonymous letters.

- Remember to keep your letter short - better to sacrifice one of your key points for the sake of brevity if that keeps your letter to the right length. Look at the published letters to get an idea of the right length.

## **TV and radio interviews**

TV and radio interviews can be a powerful way to get your message across if you follow some simple rules. If you're well prepared you can eliminate the worries about going blank, or saying the wrong thing, or being quoted out of context.

Remember that if you are useful to a journalist, you are more likely to get your stories covered in future. However, just because you're asked for an interview, it doesn't mean you have to do it. If you don't think the journalist or show is sympathetic, or you suspect your good news will be twisted into bad news, then you can and should refuse to give the interview.

You should try to find out as much about the interview beforehand such as whether it is live or recorded; what will it be used for; what exactly is the subject and can you have an outline and the main questions. If they want to interview you over the phone, find out as much as you can about the interview by asking the questions outlined above and try wherever possible to arrange to do it later so that you have some time to prepare.

Some preparation tips before the interview include:

- Remember your key messages (and a couple of back-up facts) and stick to them - keeping your messages as short and simple as possible.
- It sounds silly, but actually practise saying your messages out loud as this will help you to feel more confident during the interview.
- Know the obvious things about your organisation and why you are taking your particular action in case you are asked.
- Anticipate what the difficult questions might be and prepare some short answers - it might help to think about who your potential opponents are and what issues they would raise to counter your campaign.
- Try to develop some phrases that might be used as soundbites
- If it's a TV interview, think about what to wear. Smart but bland is good - anything too casual or remotely eccentric will distract viewers from your message.

And during the interview:

- Remember that anything you say to a journalist can potentially be quoted. If you don't want it in the media, then don't say it, even if you think you're having an off the record conversation
- Try to sound passionate, but do stay calm - shouting or ranting won't help your cause.
- Nor will preaching - people don't want to be told what to do, but they do want to know the benefits of joining your campaign.

- Take charge of the interview if you can. Try using the ABCD technique:
- A Acknowledge the question (1 second) eg yes....no....I don't know....I'm not able to answer that.....
- B Bridge (3 seconds) e.g. but....however....what I can tell you is....let's be clear about this...
- C Control and clarity (30 seconds) eg key messages
- D Dangle eg what's really interesting is.....
- Watch out for the signs of the interviewer trying to draw you into an argument and don't take the bait - respect their view, point out where they are wrong and stick to your messages
  - Make it real by using examples and the stories of real people.
  - Keep it simple and don't use jargon. Find some analogies to use if what you want to say is quite complex.
  - Don't lie and don't pretend to know something if you don't.
  - Give your campaign legitimacy by talking about your organisation.
  - If it's a TV interview, be careful with your body language and try not to fidget. If you're sitting down, have your bum in the back of the chair, lean forward and use your hands to communicate (without flapping!)
  - If it's a pre-recorded interview ask to do part of it again if you're not happy with how it went.

When it's all over, don't forget to send a short message to the media outlet thanking them for the opportunity to participate. Watch or listen to your big moment and try to appraise your performance and ask others to help you with this - did you get your message across as well as you could have done? What would you do differently next time?

## **Press Releases**

Be sure to issue press releases at all key stages of your campaign, but remember that only a small proportion of press releases ever get published. The purpose of a press release is to give journalists the facts about an issue and enable them to get more details where necessary. The following points are worth remembering when preparing a press release:

- Keep it short - one side of A4 if possible
- Date it at the top so that it is easy to see that this is a current issue
- Have a short, eye-catching headline
- Keep the information simple (and in a style to suit the publication)
- Have a short first paragraph - just two or three sentences summarising the entire message. Remember that sub-editors cut from the bottom
- Avoid jargon

- If you are using quotes, try to ensure they are from and named and if possible, senior individual. Make sure that person is available for comment and fully briefed.
- Put your contact details at the bottom - be sure to include a mobile phone number as journalists may want to contact you outside office hours.
- Proof it, and get someone else to proof it too, before you issue it - mistakes are unnecessary and could cast doubt over the credibility of your campaign in some way.

### 3. Mobilising your supporters

#### Who are your supporters and what will they do for you?

Generating and maintaining support for your campaign is a key element that will need to be factored into your campaign planning. There are many methods that you can use to recruit supporters and your organisations may already have members / service users / stakeholders that you can seek support from. Social Media is also a powerful way to recruit support and publicity for your campaign and we will be developing an information sheet specifically about this in due course. Once you have some supporters you need to consider what you will ask them to do for you.

Some people who support you will be very committed to working with you on your campaign and will be willing to dedicate their time to undertaking campaigning activities. Others will be just as supportive but have less time. There will also be those who are happy to add their name to a petition or write to a Politician but would not be willing to attend meetings or demonstrations. It is important to be able to make the most of whatever is on offer from your supporters and many Campaigning experts suggest that a good way to do this is to categorise them.

NCVO's 'The Good Campaigns Guide (see: [www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/products-services/publications/good-campaigns-guide-voluntary-sector](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/products-services/publications/good-campaigns-guide-voluntary-sector)) suggests that you segment your supporters into:

- Advocates** – this might only be a small proportion of your supporter base, but as they are highly committed they can act as ambassadors and have a significant impact.
- Supporters** – this will be a larger group, and while not having the same level of commitment as the advocates, they will be willing to take action periodically.
- Joiners** – this is likely to be an even larger group. While they will be sympathetic to your cause, they might not have the time, or simply do not want to actually get involved in something they see as too 'political'. But they are still useful supporters to engage, as they may sign petitions, donate to your campaign, or even write to decision makers in support of your campaign.

While segmenting might sound like a complex process, it can be done simply. In sign-up leaflets, through your website mailing list or other resources and materials you use, you can simply give people different options about how they can get or stay involved.

Some activities that you could ask your supporters to undertake on your behalf are:



- Telephone campaigning
- Door to door canvassing
- Writing letters / emails
- Lobbying their elected representatives
- Signing and generating support for a petition
- Holding local meetings and events
- Recruiting other supporters

If you have a large enough number of supporters or think that you have the potential to attract more via good media coverage or effective networks / partnerships you could consider an event or protest. Some of these include:

- Protest
- Public Meetings / Demonstration
- Vigils
- Stunts
- Street Theatre
- Sit Ins
- Marches

## **Protest**

A protest can strengthen your campaign, attract press coverage and raise funds. Once you have set up your campaign, done your research and contacted decision-makers, councillors and political representatives, you may want to consider organising a protest. The event needn't be confrontational, and can help open dialogue between your campaign and anyone opposing it. But you should think carefully too. It may not be the right way to make your point or to achieve what you want and you may put people off.

If you do decide to protest, make sure you have people at the events who understand what your key messages are and how to communicate them to the media and the wider public.

## **Benefits**

- Public speakers and meetings can provide a high level of debate
- A good speaker at an event can engage drifting support
- Protests are good opportunities to hand out leaflets and engage new support
- Protest events can bring media coverage of your campaign
- A sizeable march demonstrates strength of feeling
- Large numbers are not needed to make stunts and vigils effective
- A vigil can be held anywhere, including outside the door of your target

## **Risks**

- You might attract unwanted troublemakers seeking a forum
- If the weather is bad, people may not turn up
- If you are picketing an organisation's headquarters there may be strong opposition
- If you have poor turnout, you may demonstrate that you only have limited support for your aims
- You may need police permission and they might not oblige
- If you organise a noisy demonstration, you may alienate more 'moderate' supporters

There are different ways to protest about something you want to change. First, ask yourself, what do you hope to achieve by holding a protest? Is your main aim to show the strength of your support, to raise awareness, or to influence decision-makers?

## **A public meeting or demonstration**

A public meeting is an open forum to debate views on something and to work out campaign aims or solutions to a problem. A demonstration is an outdoor gathering used to demonstrate the volume of support for a campaign whose aims are already decided.

Public meetings and demonstrations are good ways to protest if you have time to advertise in advance and can find an easily-accessible venue.

Public meetings can:

- Raise awareness
- Raise funds through collections
- Show the level of support locally
- Provide an opportunity to take advice or criticism from people not closely involved in the campaign
- Provide a chance to discuss your campaign with any opposition

## **Vigils**

A vigil is when people stay awake during the normal hours of sleep for some special reason or cause. A vigil works best when:

- There is an organised core of people
- It is held in a well-chosen and high-profile public venue
- It lasts for several hours
- It is quiet or silent
- It is carefully organised in advance so that there is no confusion or debate during the vigil itself

## **Stunts**

Stunts are used to attract maximum attention. Stunts are striking one-off events or gimmicks designed to attract maximum attention, especially from the press. Stunts can be ambitious or simple, expensive or cheap, but can take more planning than other forms of protest. You need a good, eye-catching idea and slick planning, or you risk embarrassing your campaign.

## **Street theatre**

Another type of stunt is to create a piece of street theatre. A simple, funny sketch acted out on a street corner can get your campaign noticed in a light-hearted way. You don't need many props, just a bit of confidence and some ideas you have tried out in advance.

## **Sit-ins**

A sit-in is when a group goes into a building or space and sits down for a period of time in protest. Often people sit-in until a problem is resolved, for example, until a meeting is promised between the campaign and those it is targeting. It is important that the venue for the sit-in is appropriately linked to the campaign.

## **Marching**

Marching through a town or city can bring your protest to a wider audience than holding a meeting or demonstration in one place. Marches work well if they have a focus at the end, or if marching has a specific purpose. Don't forget that you may need permission from the local police for a march. For maximum impact, you will also need to ensure you have plenty of banners and placards with your snappy slogans on them – you don't want to miss any opportunities to get your message across.

## **Flash Mob**

A flash mob is a large group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place, perform an unusual and pointless act for a brief time, then disperse. The term *flash mob* is generally applied only to gatherings organized via telecommunications, social media, or viral emails. This can be effective but does rely on an e-communications strategy for mobilising support for your campaign.

## **And remember.....**

Whatever activity you ask your supporters to undertake it is essential that they are given information, support and feedback. Developing and cultivating your relationship with your supporters can be as essential to your success as developing your relationship with your campaign target. It is also worth remembering that your campaign may well be one which is aimed at raising public awareness or changing public behaviour in which case generating support amongst “real people” is an

essential component for your campaign. Never underestimate how far a good supporter base can carry you – it worked for Barack Obama!

#### 4. Lobbying politicians

Lobbying is a legitimate activity that voluntary organisations can undertake as part of their work. Information about the Charity Commission guidelines on campaigning and lobbying can be found in their information sheet CC9 available on their website ([www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Charity\\_requirements\\_guidance/Your\\_charitys\\_activities/Campaigning/default.aspx](http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Your_charitys_activities/Campaigning/default.aspx)).

Lobbying is the activity of influencing decision makers (AMs, MPs etc) in order to seek their support for your campaign. You may also be asking them to reflect this support in the way they develop policy or legislation. Working with politicians can be a very effective way of progressing your campaign and if you are campaigning for a change in policy or legislation securing political support will be a key part of your campaign. However, you may also wish to secure the support of politicians for campaigns that affect them in their role as the representative for their constituents. In this way they can be both the target of your campaign but also a potential supporter. However, this also sits alongside their party political role, their constituency role and their role in whatever democratic body they are elected to. Doing your research about who the key politicians to influence are is essential – do you want to seek government support, backbencher support, support from politicians representing certain areas or those with an interest in a certain topic?

When attempting to influence politicians it is important to be absolutely clear about what you want them to do. For example, do you want them to:

- Speak in debates?
- Write letters?
- Ask questions?
- Have meetings with others?
- Vote in a particular way on a particular issue?
- Seek publicity?
- Join your campaign?
- Change policies?
- Change or create new laws?

Politicians are busy people who are bombarded with information all the time. You need to think carefully how you are going to capture and keep their attention in a very crowded environment. Here are some more thoughts on how keep your issue out of the bin and on their desk.

- Avoid lobbying politicians via the media - lobby them directly. The media is a good way of raising awareness of the issues and the campaign more broadly, but it is useful to go to politicians directly

- Politicians react to what is raised on doorsteps - so it is useful to consider how you can get their constituents to raise your issue
- Prepare politicians for both side of the argument - otherwise they are vulnerable to attack by opponents
- Identify politicians' individual (campaigning) issues of interest
- Provide clear, concise, readable, jargon-free briefing material - it must contain key messages and clarity over what you want them to do.
- Don't expect them to have your level of expertise about your issue
- Don't presume that your cause will be their main priority - there are many good causes and competing demands
- Don't be overly persistent
- Arrange face to face meetings, possibly with a small group or delegation, and provide opportunities for politicians to have personal experience of the campaign
- Be rational and objective and avoid ranting
- Try to get cross party support and use cross party coalitions
- Think about how politicians' aides/staff can assist. Where they exist they can be very useful contacts.
- Discuss with them how best to get publicity and respect that they may also be experienced campaigners who could have good ideas
- Keep them informed of all campaign activities/press conferences etc
- Don't play political games with politicians and a good way to avoid doing this accidentally is to do your research first and know the political environment you're influencing in.

## Sources of Further Information

Wales Council for Voluntary Action

Tel: 0800 2888 329

[www.wcva.org.uk](http://www.wcva.org.uk)

NCVO Campaigning Effectiveness Team:

[www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness](http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness)

38 Degrees – Campaigns website

[www.38degrees.org.uk/](http://www.38degrees.org.uk/)

Louder.org.uk – website for e-campaigning

[www.louder.org.uk/](http://www.louder.org.uk/)

Sheila McKechnie Foundation – Campaign Central

[www.campaigncentral.org.uk/](http://www.campaigncentral.org.uk/)

Campaign Strategy.org

[www.campaignstrategy.org/index.php](http://www.campaignstrategy.org/index.php)

Media Trust

[www.mediatrust.org/](http://www.mediatrust.org/)

nfpSynergy – Top Ten Tips for Charities from Journalists

[www.nfpsynergy.net/reports\\_presentations/nfpsynergy\\_our\\_latest\\_editorial/top\\_ten\\_media\\_tips\\_for\\_charities\\_from\\_journalists.aspx](http://www.nfpsynergy.net/reports_presentations/nfpsynergy_our_latest_editorial/top_ten_media_tips_for_charities_from_journalists.aspx)

They work for you.com – find out how your MP has voted on different issues

[www.theyworkforyou.com](http://www.theyworkforyou.com) (does not cover Assembly Members)

Write to them.com – find out who your elected representatives are

[www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)

If you are interest in Public Affairs and Lobbying in Wales you may wish to consider joining Public Affairs Cymru:

[www.publicaffairscymru.org](http://www.publicaffairscymru.org)

#### **Disclaimer**

The information provided in this sheet is intended for guidance only. It is not a substitute for professional advice and we cannot accept any responsibility for loss occasioned as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting upon it.

#### **For further information contact**

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