

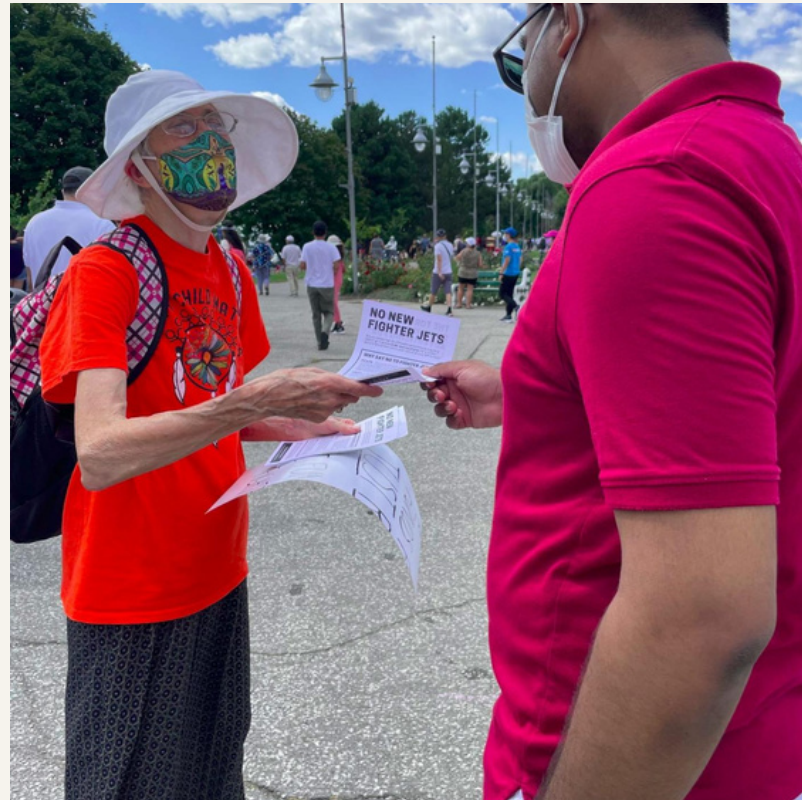


WORLD**BEYOND**WAR.org  
a global movement to end all wars

# ORGANIZING GUIDE

## PETITIONING TIPS

This guide explains the use of in-person petitioning as a tactic in the activist toolbox. A petition is a request to do something, most commonly addressed to a government official or public entity, and signed by numerous individuals indicating mass support for an issue.



Petitioning can be a very effective tool not just for collecting signatures to garner support on a particular campaign, but also for organizational list-building and for recruiting volunteers. By getting someone to stop, sign a petition, and have a short conversation, you create a meaningful, one-on-one connection (“retail-level” recruitment), which may lead to long-term engagement. And, in addition to building our list, by collecting contact info on our petitions, we can follow up with signers later to engage them in the next steps of the campaign.

While this guide is specifically focused on in-person petitioning tips, online petitions or letter campaigns are also a very useful campaign tool in today’s digital age to gather mass support on an issue, particularly for campaigns that are geographically distributed. In-person petitioning can help to supplement an online campaign, or vice versa.

# STARTING A PETITION CAMPAIGN

## Legally-Binding Petitions


Sometimes petitions are legally-binding for particular campaigns, such as a ballot measure. In those cases, be sure to read up on the local rules and regulations in advance to make sure that the design and layout of the petition itself and the methods you use to collect signatures will be approved.

- **Writing the Petition:** A petition should have a simple, catchy title that makes it clear what it's about and who it's being delivered to. For example, "Petition to Governor Hochul: Ban Fracked Gas Power Plants in New York!" Under the title, the petition description should be short — often 1 paragraph is sufficient — to make your point. Signers are busy; you often only have a minute or two before they walk away. They usually won't have time to read a lot of text before signing. Summarize your petition message in a way that is concise, clear, and compelling. If your petition is about a specific piece of legislation, include the bill number in the text. Have supplemental flyers on-hand to give to petition signers who want more information about the campaign.
- **Protecting Privacy:** Collecting petition signatures means gathering people's personal contact information, often name, email, phone, and zipcode at the minimum, and sometimes, their full street address. Handling people's contact information must be done with the utmost care. Who will the info be shared with and which info specifically will be shared? Be clear about that upfront. Petitions often opt the signers into an organization's list, with the expectation that the organization will send out follow-up information about ways to stay engaged on the campaign. Be sure to follow proper opt-in laws for your region.

Here is some generic opt-in text which should be included on the bottom of the petition and can be modified depending on your local context: “By providing an email address, you agree to receive periodic updates, from which you can unsubscribe at any time. [Organization Name] will never sell, trade, or share your information.” If you plan to opt signers in to receive mobile messages, it is recommended to include a check-box for people to explicitly opt-in to texts and to include the following language on the petition: “By checking the Mobile Opt-in box, you are opting in to mobile messages from [Organization Name]. Message and data rates apply. Reply STOP to unsubscribe.”

**Divest Philly from Nukes!**

Dear Philadelphia Board of Pensions: Philly works with 5 financial institutions to manage the city’s funds - Strategic Income Management, Lord Abbet High Yield, Fiera Capital, Ariel Capital & Northern Trust. In total, these asset managers have \$11+ billion invested in nukes. It is no secret that nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to civilization that the world has ever known. The city of Philadelphia is currently propping up the war machine. The Board of Pensions must pass a resolution instructing its asset managers to divest the city from nuclear weapons.



**Divest from the War Machine**  
DIVESTFROMWAR MACHINE.ORG

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 ZIP/POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_  
 EMAIL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
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 ZIP/POSTAL CODE \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_

By providing an email address, you agree to receive periodic updates from organizations in the Divest Philly from the War Machine Coalition, from which you can unsubscribe at any time.

**Please send signed petitions to:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Submitter Group:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**EMAIL** petition@worldbeyondwar.org  
**MAIL** World BEYOND War P.O. Box 1484  
 Charlottesville VA 22902 USA

**worldbeyondwar.org/divestphilly**

*Example paper petition format*

**Pro Tip:** Fill out the first line of every blank petition page with a fake name and contact information as a placeholder. People will be more willing to sign — and more likely to fill out the fields correctly — if they can follow the model of what is already written.

## WHAT TO BRING

- Lots of extra pens and clipboards, so multiple people can sign at once. When one person is signing, others are more likely to stop and sign.
- Signs with catchy slogans about your issue. Signs will help capture people's attention so they can quickly grasp the issue that you're petitioning about.
- Half-page flyers to hand out after someone signs, so they have something to take away with them to follow up and visit the organizational/campaign website for more information.
- T-shirts and other gear representing your organization/campaign. Wearing campaign gear makes it easier for people to identify your group/campaign from afar as they are walking by.

## PREPARATION

- Assign roles in advance, including: who will hold signs, who will hold clipboards to collect petitions, and who will be the photographer. Photos should capture the petition collectors and their signs. Note: Do not photograph the faces of petition signers unless you have their permission.
- Practice your talking points in advance so you are comfortable speaking about the campaign. You don't have to be an expert, but make sure you are well versed with the general talking points including what your initial "hook" will be to catch someone's attention and what information you might want to share as someone is signing.

## LOCATION

### Be prominent:

Choose a prominent, well-trafficked location, such as a subway station during morning or evening rush hour, or a bus stop where people are waiting around. You want to strike a balance between not impeding the flow of foot traffic while being situated in a prominent area where people will notice you and be able to easily

sign as they are walking by. It's helpful to stand at a corner so you can catch foot traffic converging from both streets.

### Know the rules:

Always make sure that you are on public property and check local laws to make sure that petitioning is legal in your area.

### Be safe:

Know the neighborhood where you are petitioning. Do not petition at night or in unsafe areas. Always stay in pairs.

### Know your constituency:

Who is the audience for your campaign? Choose a location that is relevant to your audience. For example, petitioning for GMO labeling outside of a Trader Joe's grocery store, a brand that tries to appeal to health conscious shoppers.

## Be prepared to de-escalate

Depending on the controversy surrounding your campaign and how well-resourced the opposition is, you may encounter counter-protesters who attempt to block you from collecting petition signatures. This is why it is crucial that you know the legality of petitioning in your area so that you are in the right if counter-protesters call the police on your activities. In a counter-protest situation, focus on de-escalating. If you are being shoved or blocked, do not yell or push back. By staying calm and knowing your legal petitioning rights, if police arrive on the scene, you will be in the right and able to continue your campaign.

## MAKING YOUR PITCH

- Hold the clipboard and pen upright at chest level facing the passersby. You don't want to be blocking people from passing, but you do want to hold the clipboard up in full view, extended slightly, poised and ready to catch someone's attention and have them sign.

- Know your “hook” - a short pitch to grab people’s attention as they walk by and draw them in to sign the petition. Something simple like “Reduce military spending. Sign here!” Your pitch should be short enough that you can continually repeat it as people are briskly walking by. Practice your pitch in advance so you are comfortable saying it while petitioning.
- Be sure to say your “hook” clearly, and a bit loudly. You don't want to be shouting at passersby of course, but you need to be clearly heard (and say it with a smile or friendly look, looking up at people as they're walking by).
- As someone is signing, talk briefly about the campaign. For example: “Thanks for taking a moment to sign! This campaign urges [campaign target] to [insert ask here]. This is important because \_\_\_\_\_. Thanks for signing!”
- Be polite no matter what response you get, and smile as people approach.
- Don't get distressed if you get a lot of refusals.
- Don't get caught up in long conversations or arguments. Focus on collecting as many signatures as you can from people who agree with us, rather than arguing with one naysayer.
- It’s OK if you don’t know the answer to a question. Don’t make up an answer on the spot. Just say that you don’t know and direct people to the website link for your campaign to learn more.

## WHAT’S NEXT?

Three recommended steps to do after petitioning:

- **Share your Action:** As soon as possible (ideally the same day or the next day), share your petitioning action on your campaign’s social media channels with a few photos of the action and a short blurb on the issue you petitioned about. Advertise yourself! Promote your work.
- **Databasing:** Make sure to database your collected petitions in a timely fashion, ideally within a day or two of collecting them. The longer the petitions sit on a shelf, the more likely the signers will forget that they signed and thus, they’ll be more likely to delete any follow-up information they receive once their contact information is added to your list.

- **Follow-Up Message:** As soon as possible (ideally within a day or two), send a follow-up email or text (depending on how signers opted in to your list) to the signers. Personalize the opening (Dear \_\_\_\_). Thank them for signing the petition, include 1-3 sentences about the issue as a reminder, and include an invitation to take the next step in the campaign, such as making a call to the campaign target or attending an event. Following up on the personal connection you made with the signer will help solidify the relationship and may lead to deeper engagement.

## PETITION DELIVERIES

Before embarking on a petition campaign, it's important to have a plan in place about how the petition will be delivered. You can expect to get this question upfront when you ask people to sign — they understandably want to know what's being done with their signature and how it can make an impact. In most cases, delivering the petition to the “target” or “decision-maker” is a crucial step to



*World BEYOND War New Zealand chapter organizes a colorful rally and delivers a petition to Parliament to oppose a proposed multi-billion dollar purchase of war planes.*

uphold the expectations of the signers who took the time to complete the petition in order to make their voices heard. (An exception to this might be a pledge campaign, such as World BEYOND War's Declaration of Peace, or a pledge campaign to stop buying palm oil, for example, which is focused on the pledge itself — the act of signing to join a movement of others who have signed — than delivery to a particular target.)

Petition deliveries can take many forms, from a simple drop-off, to a creative delivery event or press conference with speakers. Think of ways to make a big visual impact to amplify the number of signers, such as delivering a huge stack of boxes with all of the petitions. Try to ensure that the decision-maker, or a spokesperson from their office, is available for the delivery event, so you can meet with them and explain the campaign when making the delivery.

To protect people's privacy, often the original copies of the petition are not handed over to the target/decision-maker because the signers do not necessarily want the target to have their personal contact information. Instead, the databased petitions can be reformatted and printed out in a simplified format with the petition title and description at top, followed by an alphabetized listing of the signatures, often including first and last name, city, state/province, postal/zip code, and country.

Again, it's important to know the local regulations for legally-binding petitions, such as ballot measures or Canadian Parliamentary petitions, where the originals must be submitted. For legally-binding petitions, make sure that you know which pieces of information must be submitted to the government. Sometimes this includes full or partial contact information. In this case, some organizations include a tear-off part of the original petition so they can submit what is needed to the decision-maker but not hand over all of the signer's contact information, in order to protect people's privacy.

Contact Us: [info@worldbeyondwar.org](mailto:info@worldbeyondwar.org) ; [worldbeyondwar.org](http://worldbeyondwar.org)