



Taking Action on the Campaign Trail

Every election year we have the opportunity to more directly influence the actions of policy makers. While on the campaign trail, candidates for Congress and the presidency travel through small towns and big cities to meet people in the community, including students. These campaign stops are perfect opportunities for you, as an AIDS activist, to directly question and influence the policies of the candidates on global HIV/AIDS issues.

SGAC's new campaign around the shortage of health care workers and weak health systems in the Global South relies heavily on the ability of our network to reach out to members/ candidates for Congress. We have seen that simple interactions like asking a question at a town forum or a comment while you're shaking the candidate's hand can lead to major policy shifts.

It's not often that you get the chance to confront decision makers one-on-one. Don't miss this opportunity!

Some Ideas on What You Can Do During This Election Season:

- Go bird-dogging (for additional info, see Bird-dogging 101 guide). Get a posse of SGACers to the campaign events for all the candidates in your area. Ask tough, direct questions about what that candidate plans to do to achieve the Universal Access by 2010 pledge.
- Schedule meetings with the candidates or their staff. Talk to them about what a progressive HIV/AIDS platform looks like and help to inform their policies.
- Hold signs demanding universal access by 2010 at events where media is very prominent.
- Hold demonstrations with a health care workers theme. Wear doctors' white coats and deliver letters listing demands.
- Flier or distribute information at a candidate's event to the general public. You can work on getting other folks in your community to ask tough questions about your issues during a Q&A session.
- Hold your own forum where you invite candidates to come and talk specifically about HIV/AIDS
- Collect letters, petitions, and postcards to deliver directly to the candidates during a public event, especially when the cameras are rolling.

Keep in Mind....

- There are some very important districts and states with contentious races. Make sure that you reach all the candidates and demand action on fighting the global AIDS pandemic.
- Hold events and demonstrations where you can get solid media attention. It is helpful to stage actions in places where the media will already be gathered for a candidate's event. Stage a die-in or set up a visual display symbolizing the need for one million additional health care workers in sub-Saharan Africa.
- When doing any of these actions, let us know! Send press releases, make press calls to get them out, submit letters to the editor and op-eds. For help with doing media, please contact SGAC's Media Coordinator, caiti@fightglobalaids.org.



Bird-dogging 101: Catch Policy Makers Off-Guard

(adapted from aidsvote.org, Campaign to End AIDS, Health GAP)

Bird-dogging is the name given for the activist tactic of attending public appearances in order to win new policies from politicians. This direct interaction between activists and decision makers rarely happens in Washington, and it is easy to have a big impact, even by bringing only five people to an event who raise their hands and ask questions that provoke an answer from the person in power.

Bird-dogging takes a little planning

1. Get an event.

- **CALENDARS:** Intel gathering is important work. You can learn about upcoming public events by getting on party and candidate e-mail lists, joining the list serves of campus democrats and republicans, and calling campaign headquarters for notice of public events.
- **CALLS:** During campaign season, just call the campaign offices and say “Hi, I have a few friends and we are wondering what are the next 3-4 opportunities to see Senator so-and-so?”
- **EVENT FORMAT:** Ask the event organizers about the event: how long is it, when do the doors open, do you need a ticket and where can you get one, and, most importantly, is there a question and answer period
- **ACCESS:** sometimes you need a ticket. These almost always go quickly. Other times, if the tickets are gone or the event is a fundraiser, you can volunteer for the event to get in for free. It is not illegal to ask questions or even shout questions at politicians – even if you are a volunteer!

2. Get a posse. It can be intimidating to go to a campaign appearance by yourself, although individuals can have a big impact. However, five or six other SGACers with polite questions can completely alter the topic of a question and answer period and win new commitments that decision makers did not know they were going to make! It is best to bring a group with you so you are better able to get your questions asked and answered, and so that you can back each other up.

3. Get a plan. It is very important to make a plan in advance with your posse. You cannot wing it successfully, and you cannot really just tell your posse what to do and expect them to do it. A few important things:

- Write your questions in advance – even the most experienced bird-doggers sometimes stumble over their questions when the mike is on and the cameras are pointed at you. (See below for help on writing good questions). A team of 5-10 might write just two or three questions and then be ready to follow up when the policymaker gives an incomplete answer.
- If the event is large, like a campaign rally with thousands of people, often AIDS activists have been very successful by holding up 11x17 pieces of paper they slipped into their pockets, and/or shouting a chant 10 or 15 times. A person will need to volunteer to cue the chanting at the appropriate time, and the group will have determined in advance how long to chant. Other times, groups of bird-doggers have been successful at large and small events without Q&A simply by speaking with the decision maker on the way to the stage, or during the handshake line after the event. (see below for more on handshakes).
- **PRACTICE:** especially if you will be chanting or shouting questions, it is very important to make sure you can make yourself heard. Even for simple questions, practice can make our efforts stronger and can help us avoid mistakes.

4. Get good seats. Good seats are as close as you can get to the very front row and/or near microphones placed in the aisles. It is important to make eye contact with the decision maker and the staff who decide whether to call on you or hand you the mike. Applauding wildly and shouting supportive things during the speech can make it much more likely that you will be called on.

5. Arrive early – usually about an hour early. If there are several people in your team who are prepared to ask questions (and of course there are!) then spread out. People sitting next to each other will not be called on. This is part of why it is important to have a plan in advance and to practice.

6. Get your hand up first and fast. Most people will wait for the second or third question to raise their hand, and some only raise their hand half way. These people will rarely get called on. However, for some reason, if you are the first, fastest, highest person to get their hand in the air, you will almost always get called on! Raise your hand before questions are called for – raise your hand in the middle of the speech, and raise your hand before the candidate finishes asking for questions. We have a job to do, which is to get an answer from the decision maker, and our mission requires us to get our questions asked.

7. Get a handshake. After the formal parts of an event, there is almost always a handshake line. Anticipate where the handshake line is going to be (usually near the stage) and try to bring your team to get a handshake. The handshake line is another chance to ask the target a question, in public, and usually near reporters. One important tactic: don't let go of her hand until you have your answer! Politicians are used to this, and they will never pull away. If there are a few of you, it can help to crowd around the candidate to prolong the handshake for as long as necessary until they have said "yes" to your team. If there are more than 4 or 5 in your team, you can get them twice!

8. Get quoted. After the event, Go up and talk to the press – they will not come to talk to you. Prepare your quote just like you prepared your question. Important: answer only the question you wanted to be asked – the reporter has already written the story in their head, so if you answer their (irrelevant) question, then your quote will likely end at the point that you depart from the reporter's question. Reporters are accustomed to people ignoring questions, and they have some obligation to report on what the general public thinks at the campaign appearances, so be sure to give them only what you want your quote to say.

9. Get a report out. Bird-dogging SGACers are networked across the country in many different states – but it only works if we keep each other apprised of our efforts and progress. Our collective voices are made much more powerful if you know that someone will follow up on your question to a senator three days later and ten states away: "Senator Aimlow, in New Hampshire last week, you told a group of social workers that the Global AIDS Fund didn't need more money from Congress because other countries haven't paid. Were you saying that we should hold people with AIDS hostage in Africa because the U.S. hasn't paid it's own fair-share? Will you lead a fight for \$1.2 billion for the Global Fund next year?" Send a note to sgacchapters@yahoo.com so that other SGACers can have your back, and track our progress towards victory.

10. Repeat!

Ingredients of a Good Question

The goal of questions should be to pin the candidate down and make them give you a REAL answer rather than just rhetoric. We want the candidate to feel like the best option is to meet your demands.

We should recognize that everyone in the room might not know much about global HIV/AIDS and reporters and, often, the candidates will need a little help.

A good question is about 15-25 seconds long, and is constructed like a small narrative: problem, personal interest, solution and a demand, accompanied by a specific closed-ended "yes" or "no" question. The demand is the most important ingredient – a good question contains the answer:

"Senator Aimlow, there are 40 million people living with HIV worldwide. When I visited Kenya with my church group last year, I was struck by how US AIDS programs are really struggling on the ground in that country because of the lack of trained health care workers to meet the challenge of this horrible epidemic. As you know Senator, experts estimate that at least \$650 million, scaling to \$2 billion, is needed over five years to adequately address the shortage of health care workers necessary to fight AIDS in Africa over the next five years. Will you lead a fight for \$650 million in the coming fiscal year?"

1. The 'intro' should grab people and make them care about your question.
 - AIDS facts: 40 million people with AIDS, 30-40% infection rates in some countries, death every 10 seconds
2. A personal statement about why you care.
 - I'm involved with the Student Global AIDS Campaign / I-my relative-my friend is living with HIV / my church mission to Africa
3. The answer to the question is in the question:
 - Use supporting facts and external citations – i.e. "Experts from UNAIDS and the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health state that the US fair share of a credible response to global AIDS includes \$30 billion by 2008."
 - These are hints or prompts to the candidate about what they should answer
3. Closed-ended YES or NO questions:
 - You can make your question even more powerful by invoking or inviting comparisons to the opponent, i.e. the wrong answer is identified with the opponent, or implying that the candidate should do better than their opponent.
4. Open-ended questions can be seeking to engage both candidates in a race to see who will deliver the better results for people with AIDS, by inviting them to challenge their rivals on their specific AIDS policy failures. We should be careful not to let policy makers off easy, though!
 - Ask them about specifics of their AIDS plan and how it compares with their opponent's initiatives to fight AIDS
 - Ask them to describe how their opponent's plan is a failure and how – specifically – theirs will be better.