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# How to Use Petitions

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## ACTIVITY AT A GLANCE...

**Objectives:** Enable youth to hold a petition drive (mock or real). Develop critical thinking skills by identifying persuasive messages

**Time:** Intro activity will take less than an hour; conducting a real petition drive typically takes 2-4 weeks

**Materials:** This handout, including the sample petition, and a chalkboard/flipchart

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## Training Activity Instructions

Select a topic – either your group’s main issue or a made-up one for the activity. After reviewing the materials on the following pages, use the discussion questions to talk about how your group would run a petition drive. Record your ideas, using a flipchart or chalkboard. Then, draft your petition. If you intend to hold a real petition drive, consider using the Online Curriculum handout *Create a Project Action Plan (SA-28)* to map out your project in detail (timelines, youth committees, etc.).

# What is a Petition?

A petition is a legal document used to communicate the people's will to elected officials. It should contain a brief summary of your concern and space to record each person's signature, address, and date signed. People who distribute petitions typically go door-to-door or stand outside popular locations (such as grocery stores) to collect signatures. Once all the petitions are collected, the group who initiated the drive typically presents them – announcing the total number of signatures – to a decision-making body such as a city council or planning commission.

Look at the sample petition on the next page, and then review the following tips. If you have time, discuss why each tip is important.

## Petition Tip Sheet

- **DO NOT** let someone take the petition out of your sight to sign it – the witness statement says "...signed in my presence."
- **DO NOT** let a husband sign for a wife, a mother sign for a daughter and so on. Each person must sign her/his own signature.
- **DO NOT** let people sign in pencil; use a pen, preferably blue or black ink.
- **DO NOT** go inside people's homes to get your petition signed. If you are going door-to-door, work in small groups during daylight and talk with people from *outside* their front door.
- **DO** format your petition so the total number of signatures per page is divisible by 5 (i.e., 10, 15, or 20). This makes it easier to count later.
- **DO** fill out ALL the information of the petition; if the person doesn't have time to write his/her address, ask permission to let you fill it in for them.
- **DO** sign your name to the witness statement at the bottom legibly.
- **DO** be neat. A clean petition will be taken more seriously than a sloppy one.

## Online Petitions

In addition to paper petitions, you can also issue them online. Online petitions may not be taken as seriously as traditional ones because they are harder to verify. But you can sometimes get more names, more easily. You can make one easily using an online tool like the one at [www.speakout.com](http://www.speakout.com). (Click on "Take Action" and it will walk you through setting up a petition.)

## Discussion Questions:

Your group should have already selected a real or mock issue for your petition. Discuss the following questions, recording your answers on a flipchart or chalkboard.

- What main points would you list at the top of the petition? Are those points persuasive enough to make people want to sign?
- What groups would be likely to oppose your petition? How can the language in your petition address that opposition?
- How would you distribute your petition?
- What other groups might help you?
- Is there a central place you could set up a table and collect a lot of signatures at once?
- Once the petitions were collected, how could you make the most use of them? (Present them to the City Council? Issue a press release announcing how many people signed?)

## Petition to Save the Third Street Playground

**Background:** The Third Street Playground, located at 4<sup>th</sup> and Pine Streets in Anytown, MT, is in danger of being bulldozed to become a parking lot. Citizens should be aware of the following facts:

- This playground has been part of our community for over 50 years.
- If it is destroyed, the nearest public park where neighborhood children can play is over 10 blocks away.
- The proposed parking lot will hold 150 automobiles; that's 150 more cars driving through our neighborhood every day.

**Petition Statement:** We the undersigned don't want neighborhood children walking ten blocks to a park. And we don't want more traffic and congestion due to 150 more commuters driving through our neighborhood. We think this community deserves to retain the historic and valuable Third Street Playground.

### *Petitioners' Signatures*

Name	Address	Date
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____
5. _____	_____	_____
6. _____	_____	_____
7. _____	_____	_____
8. _____	_____	_____
9. _____	_____	_____
10. _____	_____	_____

**Witness Statement:** I certify that these people signed this petition in my presence.

Printed Name	Signature	Date
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