

## Running Political Action Forums – Cork Climate Action's Experience

**Background** – We've run 3 such forums to date. Cliona Sharkey, Policy Advisor with Trocaire, said that our May 2017 Forum played “a massive part” in progressing the Divestment Bill and they have earned praise from Stop Climate Chaos, politicians and journalists.

We followed some of the ideas of the **Indivisible** movement in the US. Adapted from [The Indivisible Guide](#):

What TDs care about	What TDs don't care much about
Constituents from their area	People from outside their constituency
Advocacy that requires effort: the more effort, the more they care. Particularly people showing up at their office, events, then personal calls, letters (and, less so, emails).	Form letters, tweets, Facebook comments (unless they generate widespread publicity).
Local and national press and editorials	International trends and movements
Groups of constituents, locally famous individuals, big campaign contributors.	A single constituent.
Concrete asks that entail a verifiable action	General ideas about the world.
A single ask in your communication	A laundry list of all the issues you are concerned about.
An interest group's endorsement.	Your thoughtful analysis of the proposed bill.

### Organisation

- Form a committee, including representatives from different groups (environmental, church, voluntary sector) and interested individuals.
- Pick a date 6 or 8 weeks in advance. Monday evenings at 7.30 work well for TDs as the Dáil is in session Tues – Thurs.
- Have a title or theme which is fairly specific and actionable for TDs. The main focus of our two 2017 Forums were the Divestment Bill and asking TDs to include the Citizen's Assembly's Climate Change deliberations in their manifestos. (We hope that climate action groups can start coordinating on this this year (2018).)
- Invite panelists. We have generally had local TDs from the two Cork Central constituencies. Keeping it constituency based increases the value of the event for TDs, but limits the numbers of both panelists and attendees. Combining 2 or 3 constituencies is probably the best compromise. Personal visits to their constituency office on a Monday or Friday is best. Be optimistic but realistic when you tell them about the numbers you expect to attend.
- Start inviting constituents. The most effective (in order) are: existing networks/group membership, personal contacts, Facebook and other online promotion, posters/flyers, press.
- A panel of 4 or 5 from a range of parties is a good number.
- Pick the venue. Hopefully you'll pay for it by passing a hat around on the night.
- Promote, promote, promote! It's crucial to get as many bums on seats as possible. We had about 60 at our first event (pre-election 2016) and the panellists (B list candidates) were pretty amazed. Our numbers, and the importance of our panellists, have grown since. However, TDs know how hard it is to get people out, especially for a non-NIMBY issue:

having 20 attendees at a rural constituency event may well have an effect on their attitude towards the issue.

- Get a chairperson. Ideally a radio journalist, who will also promote it, but who may charge. Otherwise, pick someone who has experience of impartially chairing meetings.
- Promote, promote, promote. (At the risk of repeating myself.)
- Compose 2 or 3 questions that panellists will be asked on the night and send them to them in advance. This isn't an ambush (at this stage).

### On the night

- Publicly thank panellists. Ideally for some policy they have worked on in this area, or at least for taking the time to come and listen to their constituents' concerns.
- Allow 30/50 mins at the end to take questions/opinions from the audience.
- Have a specific actionable request of the panellists and tell them you will be following up on this. (Again, national coordination would work well here.)
- Gather e-mails/contact details of attendees for future events.
- Thank the attendees and assure them that their attendance *does* make a difference.

### Afterwards

- Go for a pint – you deserve it.
- Follow up thank you emails to panellists/attendees.
- Press coverage: we have never gotten journalists to attend except as chairperson. Apparently the best way to get press coverage is to have someone competent write up a fairly complete article/press release and send it out the following morning. Have a voice recording of the event so that newspapers can fact check if they need to.
- Follow up on the politicians' actions on your requests.



Cork TDs Donnachadh O' Laoighre (SF), Mícheal Martin, Michael McGrath and Mick Barry (AAA) and a section of the audience at our May 2017 Forum on Divestment and Beyond, Imperial Hotel, Cork  
Donnachadh said "Climate Change wasn't on my agenda before tonight – it is now."

