

HOW TO PASS A FAIR TRADE RESOLUTION IN YOUR CITY COUNCIL OR STATE LEGISLATURE

The processes for passing a resolution in a City Council and a State Legislature are very similar, though there are a few differences. This document is written from the perspective of a City Council resolution campaign, with extra comments in boxes where the State Legislative process may be different.

Things to think about before you start

What do you want to accomplish by passing a resolution?

Is your goal to raise awareness and educate the public, to make a strong statement in your City Council that could be used as leverage with your State Legislature or Congressional Representatives, to engage your Council in studying local trade impacts, to provide a way to involve and engage activists, or all of the above?

What do you want your resolution to say or do?

There are a myriad of different ways to word a resolution depending on what you want it to do, how strong you feel you can make it, and what local issues are most prevalent. See the attached samples for ideas on resolutions opposing particular trade deals, or examining local trade impacts. Feel free to mix different approaches to get a resolution that resonates with your locality and is the most politically effective for your goals.

What type of campaign will work best?

The goal of your campaign will determine how it should be structured. A broad-based campaign involving a large amount of public education can serve many goals and be effective in raising awareness regardless of whether or not your resolution actually passes. Smaller campaigns utilizing organizational leaders rather than the public can be very effective in building coalitions and opening the door to further education. If you're looking to pass a resolution calling for a study of trade impacts or creating a trade task force, you may wish to structure your campaign more around a top down strategy of insider lobbying of elected officials rather than a bottom up broad public effort.

The structure of your campaign should also take into account the feasibility of actually passing your resolution. Talk to activists and leaders within your community to make a feasibility assessment. If you have very little hope of passing a resolution in your city, you may want to consider starting off with a campaign in a nearby smaller or more progressive city, like a college town. One technique is to "surround" a city by passing resolutions in several nearby cities, and then returning to your original target with more credibility and leverage. If you are able to pass a number of City Council resolutions, you could follow up by trying to pass a similar resolution in the state legislature.

Getting started

Forming your coalition of allies

You'll need broad support to win your campaign, and this coalition building serves an important role by bringing new groups into the long-term trade fight. Trade encompasses so many issues – try to include representatives from labor, environmental, consumer, food safety, agriculture, women's, faith-based, immigrant-rights, and community groups. These groups will assist you in lobbying efforts and possibly testify to the Council if that becomes part of the process. Bring your potential allies on board at the start so they have input in the content of the resolution and campaign and so they are invested in the effort.

Developing the resolution

Write or adopt a comprehensive, clearly stated resolution within your coalition. It is vital that coalition members have input and ownership in the development of the resolution. Think about which action points are the most effective and feasible. Including everyone in the process will help you allies to speak confidently and intelligently about the resolution to the public

and elected officials they are trying to influence. Once the resolution has been created, create a plan and timeline for its passage.

Researching your targets

Learn about the Council and its Members. What are the dynamics in the Council? Who is most influential? What are the Members' voting records? What issues are of most concern to them? What committees do they serve on? What constituencies do they represent? Determine how to pitch the resolution through the filter of the City Councilor's interests. Present the issues by building on what the Member already knows and is interested in, rather than giving him or her something entirely new.

What local laws or regulations are threatened by new trade and investment agreements? Research whether your city has a living wage law, an anti-sweatshop procurement policy, purchasing preferences for minority or women owned businesses or recycled products, or any other kind of legislation that could be challenged by WTO and FTAA rules. Your City Council may have a web archive to help with this research. Leaders of local labor, environmental, and community groups and receptive Council Members can also be a resource.

In your State Legislature

- If your State Legislature does not have web archive, the Secretary of State may be able to help with this research.

Cultivating your main sponsor

You will need someone to introduce the resolution and to keep you in the loop throughout the process. Does anyone in your coalition have a relationship with someone on the City Council? Do you know anyone who knows someone with a connection who could be brought into the effort? If you are not able to identify a preexisting relationship, look at past voting records to identify potentially receptive Members.

Once you have identified a Member who you would like to introduce the resolution, have a meeting with him or her and your coalition members to present the idea and the sample resolution. Discuss the contents, focusing on local trade impacts and the way in which trade agreements threaten local control. Offer to adjust the language of the resolution based on the Council Member's input. The less work you make for the Council Member, the more likely they are to be supportive. Make sure your potential sponsor knows that you will do the groundwork for the campaign and that you have grassroots capacity. Reassure them that this is not a big commitment for them.

In your State Legislature

- The process to pass a resolution is longer. It will need to pass through committees. Talk to the staff of your champion Senator or Representative to learn more about the committee structure – it varies between states.

Mention mainstream organizations such as the NAACP, associations such as the National League of Cities, and other state and local governmental bodies that have passed resolutions or taken a stand for fair trade. Try to give the Council Member a sense of political cover - that they are not going out on a limb and that there are other elected officials that support this position as well.

Gaining support and visibility

Lobbying the Council

Set up meetings with other Council Members to lobby for their support. A number of well informed and influential coalition members should attend and be prepared to discuss specific areas of expertise. Make sure you bring an information packet to leave with each Council Member. Include articles on local trade impacts and resolutions and statements from relevant organizations.

You should also set up meetings with the Mayor, City Manager, City Clerk, City Attorney, City Health Officer or whomever else might influence the passage of the resolution, depending on the structure of your City Council. City staffers often have a good deal of influence, so be sure to include them in the process.

In your State Legislature

- Your Senator and Representative's staff are key. When approaching a Member, ask to speak with the staff person who deals with international trade, labor, agriculture, or the environment. Be prepared to present issues as they relate to the staffer's area of work.
- Talk to the member and their staff about the National Conference of State Legislatures and its resolution on trade.

Building public support

You'll want to get the word out early about your campaign, and educate community leaders and organizations about the issue. You can organize short presentations to various organizations on the campaign itself, or use engagement in the campaign as your action step at the end of more in-depth trade workshops. Ask your allies to submit letters of support to the Council and use those in future lobbying and coalition building efforts.

For broader public education, you might want to organize a teach-in or public forum about the resolution. Depending on the size of the campaign, it may make sense to organize a call-in day or petition.

Engaging the Media

Once the campaign is underway send out a media release and try to get local newspaper, radio, and television stations to run a story on the campaign. Meet with the editorial board of local papers, and be sure to remember alternative media sources. (See the sample op-ed and letter to the editor.)

The final stretch

Winning your vote

On the day of the vote, be sure to fill the Council meeting room with supporters wearing buttons or carrying signs. Depending on how sure you are about the outcome, you may wish to organize a press conference for immediately after the vote, or wait until after the vote to make that call. Your press conference should include key coalition members and City Council allies.

Follow-up

The passage of your resolution may be just the beginning of your campaign. Even if your resolution doesn't pass, you can turn your collaborate effort into a victory. Be sure to solidify the contacts you've made, writing thank you letters to Council Members and allies who were helpful. Develop a plan for keeping these elected officials updated on these issues. Publicize your win in newsletters and at future events. Have a celebration and debrief meeting with your coalition partners and utilize this victory as momentum for further action.

If the resolution does not pass and you would like to try again, continue your education of elected officials, build a stronger base of public pressure, and reword the resolution to reintroduce at a later date. Either way, be sure to write CTC and let us know what happened – ctc@citizenstrade.org.

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CITIZENS TRADE CAMPAIGN IS A COALITION OF LABOR, ENVIRONMENTAL, RELIGIOUS, FAMILY FARM, AND CONSUMER ORGANIZATIONS UNITED IN THE PURSUIT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN TRADE POLICY