

TACTIC

PUBLIC FILIBUSTER

In a public filibuster, a group of people interrupt and seek to shut down a public hearing or government vote by standing and speaking, one after the other. It's confrontational, but polite and constructive.

CONTRIBUTED BY

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Daniel Hunter is a trainer and organizer with Training for Change, which practices a direct education style rooted in popular education, helping each person find their own wisdom and strategic brilliance. He has trained thousands of activists including ethnic minorities in Burma/Myanmar, pastors in Sierra Leone, independence activists in northeast India, environmentalists in Australia, and Indonesian religious leaders.

"BE HONEST, EXPRESSIVE, POLITE, AND ON-MESSAGE."

Many people know about the US Senate's procedural filibusters, in which a dissenting senator holds the floor to keep a vote from happening. The people's version, the public filibuster, is no different. When activists face hostile government agencies or hearings that exclude the public, this relatively low-risk tactic injects the public's voice into an otherwise closed-off process. Confrontational but constructive, it has been adapted by a range of citizen groups.

In 2007, for example, a dozen members of Casino-Free Philadelphia decided to use the public filibuster at a Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board (PGCB) meeting. For two years, the PGCB had refused to let members of the public testify at so-called public hearings, but this time the public was going to have its say. One at a time, members stood up and began testifying. Each one was told to be quiet by the chairwoman. A recess was quickly called, and the members who had spoken were escorted out of the building by police and told they would not be allowed to return.

When the board reconvened, the chairwoman warned the remaining members of the group not to interrupt. Naturally, one after another, members stood up and continued the filibuster. They spoke over the banging gavel of the distressed chairwoman and over the "official" testifiers as they coolly tried to continue. Another recess was called, and then another, as the public filibuster rolled on. Finally, the PGCB shut down the entire meeting. The result: Rather than risk another such engagement, the PGCB changed its policy to

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Stories

- Bidder 70 (Tim DeChristopher)
- Honk at Parliament
- Wisconsin Capitol Occupation
- Yellow Pigs in Parliament

Tactics

- Creative disruption
- Infiltration

Principles

- Anger works best when you have the moral high ground
- Develop an inside-outside strategy
- Don't dress like a protester
- Everyone has balls/ovaries of steel
- Give voice to those that can't speak
- If protest is made illegal, make daily life a protest
- Kill them with kindness

allow the public to speak at hearings.

To an unsympathetic eye, disrupting a meeting can come across as mob rule, especially when poorly done (see: TACTIC: Creative disruption). The power of the public filibuster depends on carrying out the action in a dignified manner, as well as framing the tactic properly. Calling the action a “public filibuster” helps lend the kind of legitimacy recognized by reporters and the broader public.

When planning a public filibuster, be sure to stay positive and respectful. Your tone matters a great deal, and your bearing and presentation should be above reproach. Be honest, expressive, polite, and on-message. Focus on the issue at hand, not the person trying to run the meeting. Also, show some compassion for the chairperson, who is used to being in control. This action threatens their power and puts them in an awkward and uncomfortable position. Be gentle with them.

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Daniel Hunter, 2013

<https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0988550806>

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- Maintain nonviolent discipline
- Make the invisible visible
- Play to the audience that isn't there
- Show, don't tell
- Turn the tables

Theories

- Action logic
- Direct action
- Hamoq and hamas
- The tactics of everyday life

Methodologies

- Power mapping
- Story of self, us, and now

TAGS

Action design, Direct action, Language, Media