

A Guide for Organizers

HOW TO COLLECT SIGNATURES AND TALK ABOUT THE USA PATRIOT ACT TO THE UNCONVINCED OR UNAWARE

Many people have not yet heard of the Patriot Act, so as activists it is very productive and satisfying to talk about it to people who are not already “part of the choir.” Summer street fairs and farmers markets in the Southern California area provide great venues to get started. There you will find a variety of “average folks” of various ethnicities, classes, and political persuasions all commingling on the streets in a relaxed atmosphere, often quite open to talking to you.

An effective and simple opener is: “Have you heard of the USA PATRIOT Act?”

If they say yes, ask them (your clipboard in hand) if they would like to sign a petition supporting the Constitution and requesting the repeal of the Patriot Act.

If they say no, hand them a leaflet and begin talking. The main points to start out with may be:

- When it was passed and under what conditions
- Some of the provisions that cause concern

Some people will feel comfortable signing immediately. Others will wish to take the leaflet and study it. If they seem eager to learn even more, or if they ask you about the Homeland Security Act or “Patriot Act II,” you can offer them the essay “**About the USA PATRIOT ACT**” (in this training kit), which discusses some of the issues around this Act.

You may wish to emphasize aspects of the act which you feel would most personally affect those you are talking with. For immigrants, it may be the lack of due process and racial profiling; for working class people, it may be the unwarranted searches and “sneak and peek” provisions; for middle class people, it may be the attacks on their right to privacy regarding their email, bank records, book purchases, and charitable contributions.

Do try to find something to validate, respect, or agree with. For example:

- If people express that it may be necessary to clamp down on our rights in order to find terrorists, empathize with everyone’s need to be safe from terrorism. Express that we can never be completely safe, and that there is a delicate balance between security and freedom. Explain how this Act could be abused.
- If people think we are exaggerating the dangers of this act, agree with them that it does sound “far out there.” Talk about how, historically, crackdowns and social changes haven’t come overnight, how the legal basis must first be laid and public opinion must be won over. Our rights may be so gradually eroded that we are not aware of it until one day we find - too late - that the balance has tipped far towards the repressive end of the scale.
- If people are afraid to sign, validate their concerns. Remind them gently, however, that now is the perfect time to take a stand against this Act, **before** it is widely implemented. Later may be too late.

Don’t waste time talking to those whose opinions are firmly set in favor of the act.

Do provide activities, a mailing list sign-up, and an invitation to meetings for those who are ready to become actively involved against this act.

Do be sure **everyone** leaves with a leaflet. Have all information available in Spanish.

Don’t make this a “liberal,” anti-Bush, or anti-war issue. Everyone should be able to unite against this act, regardless of their political persuasion.