

environmental youth forum

DIRECT ACTION TOOLKIT: PARTICIPATE IN A BOYCOTT



What is direct action?

Direct action refers to the political tactics and methods used to raise awareness or force discussion on an issue. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., nonviolent direct action “seeks to dramatize the issue [so] that it can no longer be ignored.” Like voting, direct actions, which include protests and sit-ins, are an essential part of a democracy. Unlike voting, however, direct actions can happen at any time, and anybody in a society can initiate a direct action—not just those of voting age.

Boycott

A boycott is a form of direct action in which participants choose to stop supporting a business or group. The most common type of boycott is when consumers decide to stop purchasing goods or paying for services from a company. In the 1950s, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. famously helped organize a boycott on buses in Montgomery, Alabama, which led to the end of segregation in that city. Boycotts rely on the power people have simply by choosing where to spend their money, and they can force those with more power to listen to and negotiate towards change.

INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Research the issue

Effective direct actions always start with a solid understanding of the issue you are trying to address and the community you are trying to reach with your message. First, understand both sides of the issue. Then figure out what changes you want to see.

Step 2: Research companies

Once you have an issue in mind, start identifying companies and products that contribute to that issue. Ethical Consumer is a nonprofit organization with a website (www.ethicalconsumer.org) that lists which companies and products relate to different ethical consumer issues, such as impacts on the environment.

Step 3: Look for existing boycotts

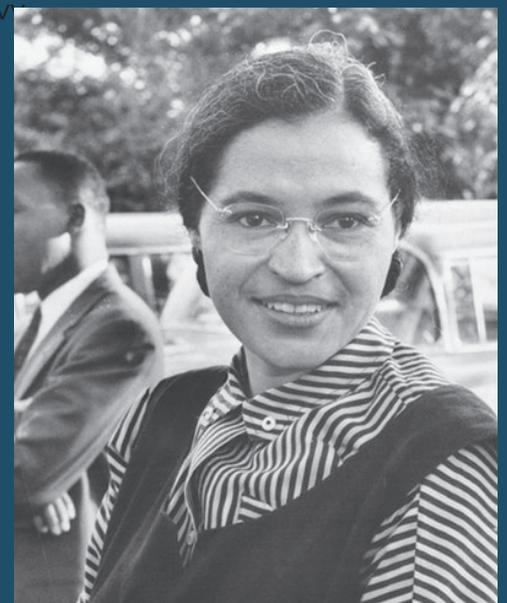
Boycotts derive their strength from numbers, so to have the most effect see if there's already an existing boycott that you can join. In addition to tracking ethical companies in different industries, Ethical Consumer also maintains a list of current boycotts that you can explore (<https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/ethicalcampaigns/boycotts>).

Step 4: Talk to your family about participating in the boycott

As a young person, you probably don't get to make all the choices about what products you buy or companies you support—often, this is up to your parents or guardians. Therefore, if you decide to boycott a product or company, it's a good idea to talk to your parents/guardians about why you want to do this. You can try to get them to support you by making it a household boycott or at least respecting your decision to participate in the boycott as an individual choice.

Step 5: Spread the word!

Once you have decided to participate in a boycott, you can strengthen the action by getting more people involved. Educate your friends and classmates on the issue. And of course, write to the company or business you are boycotting and tell them what they need to do in order to end the boycott.



By refusing to give up her seat on a bus, Rosa Parks sparked a city-wide boycott, which led to the end of segregated seating.

"When you're dealing with boycotts, you don't need everyone. You just need enough to be effective."

Al Sharpton
Minister and Civil Rights Activist