

# BIRD DOGGING FOR GLOBAL CLIMATE COOPERATION



<i>Global Climate Cooperation</i>	1
<i>What is Bird-Dogging?</i>	2
<i>Recruit and Train Your Squad</i>	3
<i>Craft your Question</i>	3
<i>Get Clear About Your Goals</i>	5
<i>Prepare</i>	6
<i>Find Opportunities</i>	7
<i>GO Time!</i>	8
<i>Make it Count: Share your Story</i>	11

## Global Climate Cooperation

Justice is Global is building a grassroots movement to make the global economy equitable and sustainable. We started organizing around progressive alternatives to the US-China conflict and global solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic. We're now organizing a new campaign within the US for global climate cooperation. You can learn more about our agenda and [sign the climate cooperation pledge here](#).

This guide is meant to advance the global climate cooperation agenda through storytelling and engaging decision makers about our issues. [You can learn more about our theory of change and ways to make climate cooperation a reality here](#).

## What is Bird-Dogging?

Bird-dogging is a powerful tactic used by grassroots activists to get candidates and elected officials on the record about important issues. Grassroots constituents like you can often get officials to say things they would never reveal in a more structured interview. The term is a reference to hunting dogs and the goal is to engage decision makers to come out of the bush and into the light of accountability.



## Get Clear About Your Goals

It is important to be clear in these kinds of direct candidate engagement moments what you hope to get out of it. Is the goal to move them to your side? Or to shame them and polarize the public against them? For example, one might go to a town hall and disrupt, drop a banner, or challenge the speaker. These are also effective tactics that can move a campaign forward. For example check out [this beautiful interfaith action](#) challenging House Speaker Hakeem Jeffries about AIPAC funding. Or this [viral and very influential bird dog](#) of then Senator Jeff Flake around Brett Kavanaugh's hearing. These actions can be especially powerful at polarizing against your target and casting them as a villain in narrative campaigning. In the case of the Jeff Flake action—it seemed it did influence his decision, but often these more confrontational tactics are not going to move your target directly. Especially if they are a target you want to build a relationship with, confrontation will likely make that much harder. Some of our allies have been denied meetings with elected officials for disruptions they conducted years prior.



Sometimes they might respond in ways you don't expect. For example, activists with the New Hampshire Youth Movement targeted then [congressional candidate Beto O'Rourke](#), about

accepting fossil fuel money for his campaign. The activists got him to commit to return the money!

Oftentimes the best strategy is to just let the target make a mistake and capture that on the record. Try to ask direct and targeted questions and let them say something that betrays their true self interest—power and protecting the powerful interests who support them. Think for example of Mitt Romney’s private comment about [47% of americans](#) that was very damaging when leaked to the press.

So before you do a bird dog action as you are crafting your question and your strategy ask yourself:

- Who is the audience you’re trying to reach?
  - Is it your target?
  - Is it the donors?
  - Community members in a particular district?
  - The broader public?
- Is the target moveable?
  - By this we mean how much power do you have to move them?
  - Are you in a position to threaten their power enough that they might change their position?
- If you can’t move your target to your position, is there some way you can use this opportunity to build your power?
  - Could you popularize a narrative about climate cooperation or nationalism or corrupt money in politics?
  - Could you force them to make an error/gaffe and expose their interests?

Based on that, decide on your tone and your tactic.



## Recruit and Train Your Squad

Bird-dogging is best done with a group of people that are dedicated to getting a candidate or decision maker on record and can take on a variety of necessary roles. Your squad should be nimble, fearless, and dedicated to tracking down candidates (even if it means listening to the same stump speech over and over again).

At the very least, you need two people to pull off a successful birddog -- one person to take action and one person to film or take a photo. An ideal squad has at least one person for each of the following roles (or two, or three, or four so you can sub in based on availability).

**Question askers:** These are the members of your group that are bold and assertive. Think about the members of your group that ALWAYS ask to speak to the manager and don't give up until they are satisfied by the answer they are seeking.

**Recorders:** These folks are diligent, good on their feet, and always remember to hold the camera in landscape mode.

**Spokesperson:** The best spokespeople are good communicators who can talk to press, upload your video footage on your social media sites, and report back on your findings.

## Craft your Question

Depending on the event, your squad will only get the chance to ask one or two questions. Before the event, make sure your squad is aligned on your top question.

When you get in front of a candidate, you need to make sure your question is effective — so match your approach to the situation. For example, if you're in a town hall scenario or another forum where you have time to ask a long-form question, start by connecting the issue to your own experience, making it personal. However, if you're in a rope line or other public space where a candidate is not taking long-form questions, get directly to the crux of the issue.

**A good question:**

- Focuses on a particular issue

- Is concise
- Puts candidate on the spot
- Informs listeners, including reporters

**For an even better question, make it personal. Mention:**

- Anecdotes from your life
- Local facts
- Candidate's voting record and quotes

**What to avoid:**

- Softball questions, like "What do you think about...?"
- Multi-issue questions
- Rambling questions
- Long questions
- Overly technical questions
- Using unfamiliar acronyms

**Example: Long-form**

- I lived without health insurance until the passage of the Affordable Care Act. I've since been fortunate enough to get health insurance through the ACA, but I'm still paying incredible amounts for essential, life-saving care. I am going broke. Why do you think Medicare for All is the answer and how will you pass it?

**Example: Short-form**

- What will you do to ensure health care is accessible for all Americans? Why is Medicare for All the answer?

## Why, What, and How

When you're scripting your questions ahead of your bird-dogging opportunity, you want to structure your theme in a way that puts the candidate on the spot. That means not giving them an easy out with a simple yes or no question (because they usually won't give you a simple yes or no). So instead of asking, "Will you support a Green New Deal?," ask "What will you do to pass a Green New Deal?" or "What does the Green New Deal look like in your administration?"

While these tips can help you structure a question, remember that they're guidelines, not rules. If you find yourself with a short window to ask a question, a yes or no may be preferable. In other instances, you might want the focus of your question to be when — like, "When will you host a town hall?". Always allow yourself flexibility with your questions when preparing to bird-dog.

See resources [here](#) and [here](#) and [here](#) for more context on language and messaging.

## Prepare

### Plan your visuals:

Sometimes you may not have an opportunity to ask a question but don't worry! You can still make a statement with powerful visuals. Print any supplementary materials you need



in advance like placards, banners, t-shirts or bandanas. You can also bring props that relate to your issue, like toothbrushes if you want to ask about the concentration camps on our border.

**Plan your communication strategy:** Set up a system for your team to communicate with one another during the event. A group text with everyone's numbers in one message group works very well!

*(We Recommend the Encrypted Messaging App Signal)*



**Trackers/Researchers:** These squad members might not be as comfortable asking questions in person but they are great at doing research and tracking the target. They know how to scour candidate websites and social media platforms and have all the best google alerts set up.

Even if your team has done this many times, set aside ten minutes the day before or the day of the event to review—together—all roles, confirm meeting times, transportation, mutual support, tech (phones all charged?) and plans for contingencies. You can confirm in a phone call, an email chain, text message—whatever communication works for your team.

## Find Opportunities

In election years candidates and decision makers are much more accessible to the public. You just have to know where to look. Ideally you'd find an in person bird dog, but you can also successfully engage people virtually.

1. **Visit the congressional calendars** ([www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)) to find out when your legislators are scheduled to be in home districts for "District Work Periods."



2. **Locate the websites** of your elected officials and subscribe to their newsletters via e-mail.
3. **Sign up for email updates on their campaign websites.** These are separate from elected official pages that are hosted on .gov websites. They often have campaign events, meet and greets and other public events listed.
4. **Call your local campaign office** and ask when your member of Congress or candidate will be speaking or holding a candidate forum.
5. **Visit [townhallproject.com](http://townhallproject.com)** to see if any events are listed there also.
6. **Check your local paper** and other local media sources to stay informed of the local activities of your members of Congress or the candidates running for office.
7. **Call your local in-district office** and ask when you might have a chance to hear your elected official speak while they are in district.

## GO Time!

You put together your squad, found an event, and decided on your questions. Now you are at the town hall, meet and greet, senior center, state fair. This is the fun part. Here's how to pull off the best bird-dog possible.

**Arrive early and get in a good position.** This is especially important if the candidate is very popular, leading in the polls, or if it is late in the primary season. If there is a question-and-answer session, you'll want to be close enough for the candidate to see you and call on you. Be forewarned: Campaign schedules change quickly, and it is a rare candidate who arrives on time for an event, so build in some extra time.

**Sit strategically.** Avoid standing next to others on your team as you line up for questions. If you're able to bring more than a few people to a town hall, don't sit together so that you increase your chances of being called on. Exception: in some instances, you can plan to position yourselves so that you immediately follow-up each other's dodged questions. This isn't easy to

do, especially when at town halls where people are selected at random to answer questions, but we've seen this work beautifully on occasion and sometimes happens organically.. There's nothing like watching a squirming elected avoid answering a direct question only to find the next person asking the same question.

**Ask your question early.** When candidates invite questions, most people will not immediately raise their hands. If you do, you are more likely to be called upon.

**Keep your topic present.** If you have an opportunity to have a conversation with your target, make sure you keep your topic present. For example, if you're discussing healthcare, prime your target by mentioning healthcare directly, or the definition in every sentence.

**Be in the candidate's path.** Many candidates want to shake hands and meet as many people as possible at these events. The informal, unscripted contacts are extra opportunities to ask your questions. Position yourself in the candidate's path and ask your question as you're gripping his or her hand.



*(You can see Greg Chung, friend of JIG, positioning himself to be next in line for a handshake with then-candidate Buttigieg)*

**Take notes.** The only way to track the responses of candidates in the moment is to take a record of what they said. It is also helpful to have notes if you are trying to frame a follow-up question. If you have a friend with you, each of you can write down the response to the other's question.

**Take pics/video.** Make sure you discuss who is going to record the interaction and post on social media. Remember pics or it didn't happen.

**Be prepared to speak to the media.** Journalists often like to talk to someone who has asked the candidate a question. Remember to stay on message and talk to the reporter about the issue you asked about.

Here's a previous JIG bird dogging the CEO of Moderna [here](#):



**Make it Count: Share your Story**

Sharing your story on social media invites the public into your experience in a way that spotlights the issue you're trying to bring to the floor. Your bird-dogging videos can alter the way the public thinks about a certain issue or politician. Post your video on social media with some context about the event.

*This toolkit heavily borrows from Indivisible's Bird dog guide [here](#), Results guide [here](#), American Friends Service Committee [here](#), as well as inspiration from our allies at the New Hampshire Youth Movement who have perfected the art. THANK YOU! And please refer to their websites for more context and helpful tools.*