

# Ten tactics for renewable projects that will help earn approval



Al Maiorino

PES is pleased to share this practical advice on saving time and money, in getting approval for wind farm projects, from Al Maiorino, the President of Public Strategy Group, Inc.. This is based on his years of experience in successful and varied campaigns throughout the USA and abroad.

Renewable project companies have moved light years in the past decade on their ability to educate residents on the benefits of renewable projects. However, there is more work to be done to ensure that wind and other renewable projects do not get entangled in a web of misinformation, and eventually delayed or even defeated.

All too often, companies find that every single month a project is delayed, the renewable company loses thousands of dollars. Even a delay of a few weeks is costly, so keeping with a strict entitlement calendar is essential.

This month, one such project blocked by the Scottish government was West Coast Energy's Highland Perthshire wind proposal. The wind farm was in the pipelines for five years and had been scaled back from forty to twenty-five turbines in response to public outcry. The project would have been able to generate enough clean energy to power 40,000 homes and start a community fund that could have generated as much as £9 million during its lifespan. However, despite these benefits, after site visits and extended public input, the Scottish



be the arm of the local government you may be working with the most.

2. Stakeholders go beyond landowners. While gaining the support of the landowners and immediate neighbors for a new wind farm is essential, remember that stakeholders can include a variety of people and groups, such as former elected officials, chambers of commerce, downtown business groups, neighborhood groups, civic and nonprofit groups, and even education committee organizations.

Often stakeholder groups will not endorse a project, but often just including them in the discussion is critical. Local elected officials like to see community outreach, and renewable developers should also like to see this. Communication is often the key to gaining approval on any wind farm, and often it is the difference-maker between project approval and defeat.

3. Digital is in, even in rural areas. Use digital and grassroots campaign tactics to build support amongst members of the community and public officials. To kick off any digital campaign, prepare a thorough website that regularly updates residents, dispels new myths and disseminates new information. While very rural areas may not have many active users on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, they will still have some active users. More variety in the types of digital outreach utilized will often yield wider reach among residents.
4. Direct mail is not dead. While direct mail in large populated areas has become cost ineffective, in small rural areas it is a great way to target and disseminate information about a new wind proposal to residents of your choice. For example, companies can create a database of every resident who may have a viewshed of a proposed project, and those that do not, for different messaging.

It is also important that when purchasing a direct mail file, you make sure it is updated and accurate. Often our firm will purchase a resident and voter file, and cross match them. Voters tend to be more active civically than non-voters. However, wind companies should try and make outreach to all residents.

5. Good old-fashioned door to door canvassing. This is the tactic that political campaigns are made of applied to wind projects. In rural areas, however difficult it may be to reach homes, door to door will always earn you respect. Handing out literature on the project and making that face-to-face contact, can earn more in the end than many tactics of your campaign. It is time consuming but often worth it.

government concluded the landscape effects outweighed the meaningful contribution the project would have admittedly made to achieving Scotland's renewable energy targets.

Moreover, according to reports from The Courier, "opponents hoped the decision, and its cost in time and money, would 'convince energy companies to seek more suitable locations in the future before they submit speculative plans.'" This sentiment demonstrates that without a strategic effort to activate wind supporters in a community, public opposition can easily shift both the conversation and the timeline in their favor, costing companies valuable time and resources. Given how effective this tactic has been at delaying or cancelling projects time and time again, it is not likely to go away anytime soon.

The best way to build public support for a project is through proper communication, patience, listening and outreach. I often feel

that you cannot over-communicate when it comes to large projects. If companies stick to the facts, dispel the rumors, avoid the hype and employ some of the tactics listed below, then they may find themselves with a successful project.

Here are my ten tactics and points that should be considered in an integrated communications plan to build public support and educate residents on any wind project:

1. Talk to elected officials early. There are few elected officials that want to read about a wind proposal in their community in the newspaper as an introduction to the project. While discretion is often critical when speaking with landowners, at least having a general conversation with elected officials about a wind company's interest in their community can help down the road. Also speak to the planning staff of the municipality, to ensure you understand the process and open the dialogue with them, as they will

One problem with this type of campaigning is that people tend to be home more in the evening, when it is dark, and residents are eating dinner! Try and mix in a few Saturday daytime canvassing efforts, as your reach rate will increase for each household.

6. Telephone calls. Despite the introduction of “do not call” lists, caller identification, and cell phones, it is still possible to reach up to two thirds of residents in rural areas with landline calls. Or shall I say, at least leave a message. Letting residents know about meetings and other events about the wind farm proposal can help a company’s chances of identifying more supporters of the project.

Calling residents allows for an opportunity to reach hundreds, or even thousands of residents in a day. Residents can be polled, given information, invited to community events or open houses, invited to public hearings, etc. Be sure to leave a message, as hang up calls will not win any favor in the community.

7. Community open houses are useful. Having a community open house, prior to public meetings, is a useful tactic because it allows residents one-on-one conversations with the project team, and the developer can tweak their plans based on public feedback if needed thereafter.

A community open house often will utilize a unique setup with four or five stations or tables set up on the wind project, with an expert at each table. Residents can come in during a two hour or so timeframe to walk around the room, view the drawings, talk to the experts and ask questions. It is the best opportunity for residents to have an engaging one on one conversation with the experts.

8. Public hearing attendance is vital. The most difficult call to action to make is often asking residents to attend a public hearing and speak on behalf of your project. Meeting with these supporters prior to the hearing is essential, as most people will not attend a hearing when asked by someone they have never met.

Make sure to check in advance with the community on how long supporters can speak at a public hearing, when they have to sign up to speak (or if they have to), etc. Direct supporters to your fact sheets and website so they have the correct information on the project and rules about making public comment.

9. Media relations is more than speaking to a reporter. Send out press releases on updates made to your wind project along the way, and meet with editorial boards or reporters to ask for their periodical’s



endorsement of the project.

I always suggest that the renewable developer invite the media to tour an existing wind farm or project they have worked on, so that they can understand what is involved, the results, and speak to local residents.

10. Watch out for moratoriums. Slowing projects down through crushing moratoriums can delay a project to the point of defeat. Keep an eye out of the local politics, attend local meetings, and constantly have your pulse on the community. Moratoriums often lead to rewritten zoning that can crush your wind project chances.

Keep in mind that wind companies do not have to employ all ten of these tactics. And

certainly, tactics are not limited to just ten. Before beginning a campaign, it is important to conduct an “entitlement due diligence” report on the area. What are the pitfalls? How does the community react to large projects? What case studies would be best to share with a particular community?

Understanding that a large wind or solar farm will not gain approval unless it has been thoroughly vetted, determine what steps should be taken and what tactics should be employed to best see that the project is entitled. Don’t let your wind farm project succumb to delays, moratoriums and zoning defeat. Renewable project companies have many tactics and options, and a great story to tell.

[www.publicstrategygroup.com](http://www.publicstrategygroup.com)

### Al Maiorino

President, Public Strategy Group

Al Maiorino, the President of Public Strategy Group, Inc., is a public affairs executive presenting over two decades of success in his field.

Maiorino is a NIMBY expert, writer and public affairs consultant, who has made Public Strategy Group, Inc. a unique firm that goes beyond the traditional public affairs role of many firms. He has successfully run and won corporate campaigns involving land use difficulties, legislative advocacy issues for large and small companies ranging from Fortune 100 clients to smaller firms, and voter referendum campaigns.

He began his career as a political party operative and took the knowledge gained from a diversity of political campaigns to the corporate level over 20 years ago and formed Public Strategy Group, Inc. He has made PSG one of the few firms in the nation that specializes in building public support for development type projects, while also offering grassroots public affairs for corporate clients on legislative and regulatory issues. Throughout the years, he has managed hundreds of corporate public affairs campaigns in a variety of industries such as energy, gaming, shipping, tourism, cable television, retail development, auto racing, and housing/residential projects. His company has worked in twenty states, one U.S. Territory and three countries, and for over 20 years has helped companies gain approval on development projects totaling billions of dollars in investment.

He has authored many articles and is a regular contributor to numerous trade journals and business periodicals.