

Escalation Ladder Planner

Module 4.2 — Campaign Architecture: Anatomy of a Planned Escalation

What Is an Escalation Ladder?

An escalation ladder is a pre-planned sequence of advocacy tactics that moves from low-commitment public education through organized direct pressure. The critical word is **pre-planned**: the ladder is designed before the campaign launches, not improvised when soft tactics stop working. Each rung has a predetermined threshold — the specific condition that triggers the move to the next level. Escalation that looks proportional to observers builds legitimacy. Escalation that looks reactive destroys it.

Anatomy of a Rung

Element	Definition
Tactic	The specific action at this rung (e.g., public comment period, coordinated phone calls)
Threshold	The observable condition that triggers escalation to the next rung (not a feeling — a fact)
Message Discipline	The core message held at this rung — what you say and, equally important, what you don't
De-escalation Trigger	The condition under which you step DOWN the ladder (decision-maker engages seriously)

Worked Example: Animal Welfare Ordinance Campaign

Campaign goal: City council adopts commercial dog tethering ordinance.

Run g	Tactic	Escalation Threshold	Message Discipline
1	Public education op-eds, social posts, leafletting at community events	City council receives fewer than 10 constituent contacts in 30 days	Frame: 'Our community values animal welfare'
2	Online petition + public comment letters at next council meeting	Council acknowledges issue but takes no action after 2 meetings	Same frame + 'Here's who in our community cares'
3	Earned media — local news story, veterinarian endorsements, visual campaign	Council defers agenda item without explanation	Add: 'The delay has a cost — here's what it looks like'
4	Coordinated constituent calls to all council members + public demonstration at council chambers	Council votes to table without discussion	Shift to accountability: 'Silence is a choice with consequences'
5	Economic pressure: business community engagement, electoral accountability framing	Campaign win or credible commitment to vote	Hold firm: 'We will be here until this passes'

Key Principle

Escalation should look proportional to observers, not reactive. When the public watches your campaign intensify, they should think: 'Of course they escalated — they tried everything reasonable first.' When

decision-makers see your escalation, they should think: 'These people are disciplined and will keep going.' Neither reaction is possible if the escalation is improvised.

Your Escalation Ladder (blank)

Rung	Tactic	Escalation Threshold	Message Discipline
1 — Soft			
2 — Light			
3 — Medium			
4 — Hard			
5 — Direct			