



BUILDING YOUR CASE

1. Some words about research

Facts win arguments. Information, data and facts help you refine the message that you want to get across. Authorities are more likely to listen to a convincing argument.

But what kind of data helps prove your case? There are nearly as many ways to collect information. We've focused on the main ones here. We've also put together some ideas about how you might pull together everything you've collected, so that you can easily and effectively present it to other people.

2. Quoting the experts

There is lots of research around about walking and related health, transport, infrastructure, funding and benefits. Look for research, case studies, best practice ideas and policies from around the world in local libraries or on the internet. Our useful links can help you get started. Finding these will save you hours of data collection and analysis!

If you come across something useful that you think might help other groups like yours, share it with us!

3. Observing

There are some facts that you may need to collect yourself. Gathering specific evidence about concerns in your area can also highlight the problem with your neighbours, galvanise support and create the chance to work together to come up with local solutions.

One of the simplest ways to research something is simply to observe what's going on. You'll be amazed how much you notice about whether your neighbourhood is walking-friendly or not once you've got your eye in. Observing and recording what you see also helps you decide what to research next.

#Tip: A great tool to help you assess your streets is a [walking audit tool](#). Use it to help you rate how walkable your streets are.



4. Counting and measuring

Numbers can be pretty convincing. Here are some ideas of things you can count to paint a picture of what's happening:

- If people are driving down your street to avoid nearby traffic lights - do a count of how many cars do this at peak times, on different days.
- If people who drive aren't stopping at some stop signs or crossings - count how many stop and how many don't over a specific period.
- If you're concerned about the quality of footpaths, count the number of broken or raised pavers/blocks there are.
- If the distances between public transport stops are too great, you could measure it.
- Want to know how many kids are walking to school (a good test of how walking-friendly your area is!), you could stand at the school gates and ask each child or parent how they got there today.

This sort of counting and measuring is well-recognised as a valuable tool: Bicycle Victoria has conducted bike counts for many years and used them to lobby for investment in cycling infrastructure.

If you thinking about doing some counting and measuring, there are some easy ways to make sure your data will stand up to argument.

- Work in pairs, so that you have someone else who can pick up anything you've missed.
- Set a specific time for your experiment: such as for one hour from 8am to 9am. This way, you'll be able to say 'xx number of cars (or whatever) an hour in the morning peak'.
- Repeat your measurement on a few consecutive days, and find an average. This helps you feel confident about your figures, and eliminates the potential for criticism that you measured an unusually bad day or time.

5. Talking and listening

Counting and measuring are great ways of quantifying a problem, but if you want to find out more – such as why the problem exists, or why people are choosing one behaviour over another, or what you could do to create change – you're going to need more detailed information.

One of the best ways of getting that information is qualitative research. This is more than just collecting 'yes' or 'no' answers (counting how many 'yes' or 'no's you get is just ... counting).

Qualitative research means asking people what they think and why they think it – in other words, getting some reasons to go with your numbers.

5. Talking and listening (cont.)

Some of the ways of conducting qualitative research include:

- Stop people on the street, asking them a set list of questions and recording their answers.
- Ask a few people to come together to answer questions and have a discussion as a group.
- Email or phone people with a set list of questions and asking them to respond.
- Visit other groups or forums – such as trader’s associations – and inviting them to tell you about what they think about a certain issue or problem.

So, for example, you might stand at the school gate to ask people who drive their kids to school why they don’t walk, inviting them to say which of these apply to them:

- Time pressures: the car is quicker and easier.
- Living too far from school.
- Concerns about their children’s safety near roads.
- Concerns about the quality of the footpaths or other things that support walking.
- They are on their way somewhere else in the car.
- It’s never occurred to them to walk instead.

Here are a few things to keep in mind whenever you’re doing qualitative research:

- Tell people up front what you’re doing and why – but keep it short.
- Always make sure you ask people whether they want to take part, and tell them how long it will take (3 minutes should be a maximum!).
- If you’re talking to people individually, try to stick to the set list of questions – this makes pulling the results together at the end much easier. But, you can have a ‘comments’ area next to each question, where you can record anything extra that someone tells you.
- Make sure you listen more than you talk – don’t feed people the answers you want, and be very careful to seem objective rather than biased or judgemental about the choices other people make.
- Ask people if they want to be kept in contact with what your group is doing – they may even want to join in the action!

6. Pulling it all together

Now that you've read, looked, measured and listened, it's time to turn your research into something that you can use to drive change. To do that, you're probably going to need two documents.

The first is your **research report**. It should list all the research you did and the results you got, in detail – the proportions of answers to every question, and every comment you collected. Depending how much you did, that document could run to tens of pages. It'll be a useful resource for your group, but probably too long and detailed to send to your local council, for example.

So, you'll need a second, shorter document – a **summary report** that's no more than 4 pages long. This document should clearly and succinctly capture:

- Why walking matters (and there's plenty of stuff on here for you to use in that bit!!).
- What you think needs to happen or change to encourage walking or make it easier to walk around your neighbourhood.
- Why that particular change (or changes) would make a difference.
- What research you did (remember, this is a summary!).
- Why that research backs up your position.
- What you would like to see happen next: this could be a meeting to discuss things further, some instant action (unlikely, or possible), some funding to further research, or funding to improve the issue, or whatever else you want.

And, abracadabra, without even realising it, you've created a briefing paper that accurately summarises your position, your research and what you want to see done.