



INSPIRING SUPPORTER ACTION

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INSPIRING SUPPORTER ACTION

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YOU MIGHT CALL IT INFLUENCING, VOICE, ADVOCACY OR CAMPAIGNING, BUT ALL THESE ACTIVITIES ARE ABOUT CREATING CHANGE

WHAT IS CAMPAIGNING?

You might call it influencing, voice, advocacy or campaigning, but all these activities are about creating change. At NCVO we use the word campaigning and define this as the mobilising of forces by organisations or individuals to influence others in order to effect an identified and desired social, economic, environmental or political change.

Whatever you call it and whether you are trying to save a local community centre from closing or lobbying government, campaigning is about creating a change. The impact is the real change created by a campaign – the difference it makes to people's lives.

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INTRODUCTION

Campaigning with others is about joy, passion, inspiration, adrenaline, sociability, frustration and success.

Shared experience provides a number of practical pieces of advice, which can aid voluntary and community sector organisations (VCOs) to work with supporters most effectively to achieve social change.

There is no 'one size fits all' methodology and the case studies throughout this guide illustrate different approaches. However, the basic challenges shared by VCOs are how to recruit, sustain, and empower supporters in order to achieve change.

In this guide we refer to supporters as people who can take action alongside VCOs to influence social, economic, environmental or political change. Other terms to describe people who are active on behalf of a VCOs include campaigners, activists or advocates – choose the term you prefer.

History holds examples of campaigns which have mobilised people in pursuit of change. The American civil rights movement mobilised thousands against racial discrimination. Almost a quarter of a million people marched to Make Poverty History in a symbolic action ahead of the 2005 G8 summit. Barack Obama won the US presidential election in part by activating supporters through innovative use of new media.

**PARTICIPANT AT BOND HOW DO WE MOBILISE?
ACTIVIST SESSION, 7 NOVEMBER 2009.**

**THERE IS A REAL THRILL TO THE SENSE OF
MOMENTUM THAT CAMPAIGNS CAN GET – THE
FLURRY OF ACTIVITY AND THE FEELING OF SOLIDARITY**

Working with supporters is not confined to mass mobilisation – small numbers can be effective too. The National Autistic Society's (NAS) campaign for an Autism Act achieved success by mobilising relatively few people. One MP told the NAS he was moved to act after eight constituents contacted him.

It is important to consider why, when and how to mobilise supporters into action. Do it because you calculate it will achieve your goals, not because everyone else is doing it or for any other reason. Mobilising supporters to action is not always the right tactic. If you are negotiating with government it is possible that an avalanche of emails could do more to irritate than influence.

THE ACTIVISM PYRAMID

Different levels of activism should be offered to match the diverse interests and experience of supporters as well as the time they have available to campaign. Aim to offer actions which cater to each level on the activism pyramid, [see below](#):

Breakthrough Breast Cancer describes members of its Campaigns & Advocacy Network (CAN) as Casual Campaigners, Steadfast Supporters and High Level Advocates and suggests actions to match each level.

Supporters can be encouraged to move up the pyramid if the organisation provides 'escalators' to help them. To move up, supporters need to be aware higher levels can be reached and should be provided with feedback and opportunities to build confidence and skills.

Another model of supporter participation is Rubin and Rubin's adaptation of Milbrath's description of the different levels of involvement:

- Apathetics are people with no involvement
- Passive Participants will mobilise in a limited way e.g. sign a petition, donate, attend a meeting
- Foot Soldiers work hard but rarely lead
- Issue Supporters are deeply involved and might start a campaign themselves
- Local Leaders are well known and respected in the community and might become volunteer organisers
- Professional Organisers work full-time and are paid.

**A
FEW
PEOPLE
DEDICATE A
GREAT DEAL OF
TIME AND ENERGY TO
ACTIVISM. THEY ARE
THE ONES WHO COORDINATE
LOCAL GROUPS, ATTEND
REGULAR MEETINGS WITH THEIR MP ETC.**

**MORE PEOPLE REGULARLY TAKE PART IN EASY
ACTIONS SUCH AS SIGNING A PETITION OR
EMAILING THEIR MP. FROM TIME TO TIME THEY WILL
GET INVOLVED IN MORE DEMANDING ACTIONS SUCH AS
ATTENDING A LOBBY OF PARLIAMENT OR GOING ON A MARCH.**

**THE BULK OF SUPPORTERS FEEL CONNECTED TO THE CAMPAIGN
BUT WILL RARELY, IF EVER, DO MORE THAN READ A
NEWSLETTER. THEY MIGHT OCCASIONALLY TAKE PART IN QUICK, EASY ACTIONS.**

CASE STUDY: FAIR PENSIONS

TOP TIP

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORTER ACTION IS NEEDED?

When you are planning a campaign, try this exercise with a colleague to work out whether or not your campaign requires supporters to be mobilised and, if so, in what ways.

Imagine one of you is a campaigning movement, the other is your target. Take it in turns to suggest what tactics you would each use. The person who is playing the part of the campaigning movement starts by suggesting what s/he would do to achieve the campaigning goal. The person who is playing the role of the campaigning target responds by suggesting what they would do to respond to the campaign, or continue with the status quo. You each have five turns. Who wins? Why? What kind of supporter action is most needed?

IMAGINE ONE OF YOU IS A CAMPAIGN MOVEMENT, THE OTHER IS YOUR TARGET

FairPensions teamed up with Oxfam to halt legal action by the pharmaceutical company Novartis which would restrict access to life-saving medicines for millions of people throughout the developing world. FairPensions works with investors such as pension funds and fund managers. By working with FairPensions, Oxfam hoped to lobby pension funds and other large investors who own Novartis to put pressure on the company to change its policy.

FairPensions created a website to enable individuals to email their pension providers to express concern and ask pension funds – which invest money in Novartis on behalf of the individual – to exercise influence. FairPensions briefed fund managers and pension funds on the business case against Novartis so mobilisation was accompanied by informed argument. Fund managers told Oxfam there was an unprecedented amount of scrutiny placed on them by pension fund clients following the online action. Fund managers put pressure on Novartis which said in the Wall Street Journal: “We didn’t quite expect the uproar we’ve had.” Novartis lost its court case and did not appeal.

FairPensions sets up facilities to mobilise supporters of other NGOs. About 15,000 Oxfam supporters were asked to take part in the joint action alongside around 5000 FairPensions supporters. One of the reasons so many people were mobilised quickly was because they were already briefed by Oxfam about legal issues affecting access to medicines – it is easier to mobilise people if they already understand the issue.

In recruiting supporters FairPensions has put effort into explaining that people are allowed to contact their pension provider – most people do not know that having interaction with one’s pension provider is a legitimate campaign tactic.

FairPensions’ supporters are unlikely to be personally affected by campaign issues – they are more likely to be moved to act by a sense of injustice. They are concerned about development, poverty and human rights issues and are interested in addressing the impacts of corporations. They understand large institutional investors have power over companies.

Despite having mobilised thousands in the Novartis campaign, FairPensions says: “As far as pension schemes, pension funds, pension providers and fund managers are concerned, very small numbers of people can have quite a big effect. Those sorts of organisations are not used to large numbers of people lobbying them. We have seen instances whereby a pension scheme has received two letters and has then taken up an issue. A small amount of supporters can be very valuable.”

VERY SMALL NUMBERS OF PEOPLE CAN HAVE QUITE A BIG EFFECT.

RECRUITING SUPPORTERS

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ACTIVIST SESSION 7 NOVEMBER 2009

MARTIN LUTHER KING
DID NOT SAY I HAVE A
NIGHTMARE, HE SAID
I HAVE A DREAM

WHY RECRUIT?

Campaigns are successful either when your target is morally persuaded or is pressured to the extent that there is no alternative. Mobilising supporters can be a way to achieve change via either of these routes. Sometimes it will be appropriate to use methods other than mobilising supporters to achieve your campaigning goals.

Some of the reasons why you might choose to mobilise supporters include:

- To bring authentic voices to your campaign to enhance legitimacy and influence
- To ensure your campaign is informed by real-life experiences of people affected by the issue
- To demonstrate to decision makers that public opinion is behind you
- To get MPs on your side – MPs like to see constituency support before they act.

WHO WILL YOU RECRUIT?

Determine who is likely to be interested in your campaign and what will motivate them to get involved.

According to a recent survey by nfpSynergy, 75% of the public has campaigned on behalf of a charity and almost everyone else would consider it. However, to be effective you need to target your recruitment – segment the general public, decide which subgroups to focus on and find appropriate ways of communicating using messages that tap into people's motivations.

People who get involved in campaigns tend to share certain characteristics:

- Active in the community e.g. faith communities, political parties, trade unions, support groups
- Personally affected by the issue e.g. people diagnosed with a health condition.

Think carefully about how to tailor your communications and other recruitment mechanisms to reach different groups. Consider how to avoid recruiting only from the small group of people who are already comfortable with and drawn to campaigning in favour of broadening your supporter base to include people who have not campaigned before or belong to communities who are under-represented in campaigns.

WHAT INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO JOIN?

There are multiple reasons why people get involved in a campaign. Few people sign up because you think they should, they are asked to, or the cause is a good one. To recruit, consciously tap into people's likely motivations. Some common motivations are:

- Experience of, or witness to, injustice or oppression
- Belief that a better world is possible
- Caring deeply about the issues and, in many instances, being directly affected by them e.g. many people with a disability or a health condition are motivated to campaign to improve access to services or the quality of the NHS.

Identifying a problem – through personal experience or because it has been pointed out – is important but it must be accompanied by belief that change is possible.

Good communications are key. It can be effective to 'denounce' a target in your communications, but it helps motivate people to take action if you also 'announce' an alternative. This is the difference between protesting and campaigning. This is well understood by history's greatest communicators and is transferable to VCOs' campaigns. The National Autistic Society communicated the purpose of its campaign clearly and simply (to change the law to ensure adults with autism receive the support they need) and inspired people with the scale of its ambition (to make legal history).

A sense of collective identity or community drives some people to become active, as does identification with a mission larger than oneself.

Some people will take the first step into activism even if they do not believe in your campaign. A study of pro-life activists found that some got involved out of a sense of wanting to 'do good' or because a friend or relative was already involved and had suggested they try it. Belief in the pro-life cause developed after activism had begun. Encourage supporters to use social networks – families, friends, faith groups, sports teams, educational institutions, Facebook etc – to involve others.

HOW WILL YOU RECRUIT?

Some campaigns grow organically – a small group of people get together to change something and the number involved grows without proactive recruitment. But most VCOs' campaigns will need to enlist supporters.

None of the featured case studies run recruitment drives aimed at the general public. Instead they rely on targeted methods to bring people in:

- Try to reach your audience in at least three different ways – e.g. news story, community group meeting or newsletter, email
- Use 'warm' networks to find supporters – many people already involved in your organisation are likely to campaign if asked e.g. donors, fundraisers, service users, members
- Talk to opinion leaders in community groups who might share your concerns – ask if they will recommend your campaign

- Ask supporters to link up with others with an interest in the issue to encourage involvement e.g. Plane Stupid started an 'Adopt a Resident' scheme to partner with local people living near Heathrow to work together and exchange tactics in the campaign to stop the third runway
- Enable your website to collect email addresses of people who want to get involved (but decide what you want to do with them before you start collecting addresses)
- Encourage people to reflect on issues that affect their everyday lives – Leonard Cheshire Disability service users were encouraged to discuss what they didn't like about services and were supported to make small changes; the resulting sense of empowerment spurred people on to run bigger and bolder campaigns
- Blanket mailings rarely work but targeted mailings to people who are already interested in issues similar to your own can be a good recruitment tool – FairPensions found inserting flyers into special-interest magazines yielded new supporters
- Make use of online tools such as Twitter to take your message to a wider audience and target Facebook groups that share an affinity with your issue.

IDENTIFYING A PROBLEM IS IMPORTANT BUT IT MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY BELIEF THAT CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT AND HOW CAN THEY BE OVERCOME?

People may be interested in your campaign but hesitate to get involved. When deciding whether or not to join, people will weigh the costs and benefits – the latter must outweigh the former. Potential supporters will not always voice their concerns so anticipate and answer questions before they are asked.

The table below summarises barriers and how to overcome them.

BARRIER	HOW TO OVERCOME
People believe they lack time to campaign	Reassure people they can do as little or as much as they like. Offer different actions depending on the time they may have (5 minutes, 15 minutes, 1 hour etc).
People believe they lack skill to campaign	Offer training to those who feel they need it. Allow people to determine for themselves what actions they can take.
People do not believe change is possible	Be honest – change sometimes happens very slowly, and sometimes very quickly. Use examples of previous campaigns which have achieved success
People do not believe their actions will make a difference	Explain the purpose behind the action, how it will make a difference and how it is linked to the end goal.
People feel they might not 'fit in'	Provide opportunities for supporters to meet each other so that new recruits feel welcome – make it fun!

SUMMARY

- Think carefully about why, when and how to mobilise supporters – don't just do it for the sake of it
- Don't expect everyone to want to get active, even if they are interested in the issues
- Target 'warm' networks to recruit new supporters but try to break out of recruiting the 'usual suspects' and identify why certain groups who are affected by your campaign are not engaging
- Respond to the multiple motivations of campaigners using different forms of communications and mechanisms to reach people

CASE STUDY: THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

The National Autistic Society (NAS) made legal history in 2009 when it won its campaign for an Autism Act, the first ever disability-specific law in England. Volunteer campaigners were central to the campaign strategy and vital to its success.

The Autism Act started as a Private Members' Bill. In contrast to most other bills of this kind, it received overwhelming parliamentary support and was backed by the main political parties to become law. The level of support attracted was partly due to mobilisation of campaigners, many of whom are personally affected by autism, either directly or as a parent of a child with an autism spectrum disorder.

The NAS has rapidly established itself as a campaigning charity with significant grassroots support by tapping into 'warm' networks to find recruits. The NAS built up a network of supporters through awareness campaigns and individuals were encouraged to sign up via the charity's website and campaign microsites. Local branch members – who are increasingly interested in campaigning as well as acting as support groups and providing services themselves – were also asked to campaign. Working in coalition increased the number of people who could be mobilised, as the 15 other autism charities involved had their own networks.

Several factors enabled the campaign to attract grassroots support. The goal – to make legal history – was simple, ambitious and easy to understand. Campaigners were offered multiple ways to get involved at a level suited to their interest and experience. Campaigners were mobilised at the optimum time as part of an overall strategy to put targeted pressure on the right people and could see how their efforts contributed to victory.

The key success factor was the constituency focus that supporters brought to the campaign. Campaigners attended a lobby of parliament and contacted MPs by letter, email and face-to-face to press the case for the bill. At the crucial second reading, an unprecedented 160 MPs were in attendance on a Friday to hear and participate in the debate. This was achieved by mobilising constituents to deliver a powerful message to MPs – 'We don't want you in the constituency, we want you to support the bill.' Personal stories had a potent effect on MPs. One MP told the NAS he had been "inundated" by constituents wanting him to support the bill – the MP received only eight contacts from constituents but it was enough to convince him.

AT THE CRUCIAL SECOND READING, AN UNPRECEDENTED 160 MPS WERE IN ATTENDANCE ON A FRIDAY TO HEAR AND PARTICIPATE IN THE DEBATE

SUSTAINED ACTIVISM

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NGOS TEND TO ENGAGE WITH
GRAND MOMENTS, RATHER
THAN GREAT MOVEMENTS,
WHICH ARE SLOW, TAKE
TIME, AND START SMALL

After you have recruited supporters you need to inspire them to sustained action. Try to use a range of methods to stay in touch with supporters using some of the techniques below:

COMMUNICATION

- Make actions meaningful – people will become de-motivated if you invent actions to keep them busy
- Ensure supporters understand the aim of the campaign and how their actions can help achieve it
- Educate and inform about the issue using briefings, newsletters, conferences etc.
- Make personal contact with new supporters (e.g. meeting or phone call) to offer encouragement
- If possible, send tailored letters and emails – segment your database and communicate with supporters according to their interests and levels of engagement
- Provide feedback after each action and regularly update supporters on the progress of the campaign via newsletters and emails
- Keep your website up-to-date to reflect campaign progress
- Thank people for their actions
- Celebrate success – even if it is partial.

EMPOWERMENT

- Identify people's skills and make use of them
- Involve people in shaping the direction of the campaign
- Encourage individuals to take on specific roles e.g. chair, spokesperson
- Create easy routes into campaigning e.g. ask people to take small, simple actions and progressively ask them to do more
- Stage exciting actions which visibly irritate people in power – people enjoy them and are spurred on to further action
- Provide opportunities for supporters to suggest ideas and comment on the campaign.

BUILDING NETWORKS AND COMMUNITIES

- Create forums (e.g. events, blogs) for supporters to network with each other, share ideas and information, and offer mutual support
- Allow people to activate their own networks – faith groups, social clubs etc
- Make it fun to be part of the campaign.

Online communication is valuable but has its limits, for example some older people and those living in rural areas where broadband is patchy may not have easy access to the internet, so don't rely on it exclusively. Don't neglect face-to-face contact which is important for building trust and durable relationships.

BARRIER	HOW TO OVERCOME
Lack of understanding of the issues	Produce policy briefings and campaign packs to inform and educate. Recommend books on the topics you are campaigning on
New campaigners not sure where to begin	Make it easy by providing template actions that take a few minutes to complete
Campaign is at a stage where mass mobilisation is not appropriate	Find other ways to involve supporters e.g. shaping the future direction of the campaign, evaluating progress so far, commenting on a campaign publication
Supporters not sure if their efforts are working	Provide regular feedback of campaign results
Individual supporters feel isolated and unsupported	Match supporters with each other to offer mutual support and encouragement
Supporters lack time to stay involved e.g. family commitments	Reassure people they can do as little or as much as they like
Supporters experience burnout	Make sure there are exit routes that people can use if they need to without fear of letting others down

SUMMARY

- Make it easy and where appropriate fun for people to take action
- Ensure all actions are meaningful
- Communicate with supporters regularly
- Offer actions to suit differing levels of interest and experience

CASE STUDY: BREAKTHROUGH BREAST CANCER

Breakthrough Breast Cancer has established its reputation as one of the leading cancer campaigning charities. Its Campaigns & Advocacy Network (CAN) brings together people affected by breast cancer who share the charity's vision of a future free from the fear of breast cancer. CAN is free to join and is made up of over 1000 individuals and 300 organisations including breast cancer support groups and trade union branches.

Breakthrough closely involves CAN members to influence and improve breast cancer diagnosis, treatments and services across the UK. In addition to campaigning for change, CAN members act as patient advocates representing the views and experiences of people affected by breast cancer.

This network of trained patient advocates has the skills, resources and confidence to discuss breast cancer priorities with local decision makers and form influential partnerships that ultimately deliver better outcomes for people affected by breast cancer.

In 2005, CAN members were instrumental in securing an election commitment from Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, to ensure everyone referred with breast symptoms would be seen by a specialist within two weeks. As part of its campaign, Breakthrough invited John Reid, Health Secretary at the time, to hear directly from CAN members about why waiting times were an important issue to them. The combination of personal testimonies and support from a potentially significant group of voters convinced decision makers of the need for change.

In 2007 Prime Minister Gordon Brown gave a speech at the Labour party conference recommitting to the two-week wait standard which was subsequently included in the government's Cancer Reform Strategy.

Breakthrough has turned its focus to putting pressure on government and the NHS to put this policy into practice. CAN members monitor local NHS progress towards meeting the standard, feeding intelligence back to Breakthrough so an accurate picture of what services are being provided can be shared with Ministers and civil servants. CAN members work closely and constructively with hospitals to support plans for local implementation of the standard and champion patient and public involvement in service redesign.

The Westminster Fly-In is Breakthrough's flagship annual training and lobbying event. Over two days, CAN members gather in Westminster from all over the country to lobby MPs about breast cancer issues. They are provided with materials such as distance-learning toolkits and campaign briefings to help prepare for the event and are offered coaching to help make the most of meetings with MPs.

Throughout the year CAN members are offered training in topics such as understanding the NHS and how to build a local campaign. Breakthrough also provides bespoke advice and support to individual members to help them campaign locally. Breakthrough stays in touch with CAN members through The Advocate magazine and monthly email updates.

CAN members are involved at all levels of the charity including the board of trustees. There is an advisory group of 12 people to represent CAN in all corners of the UK and advise Breakthrough on the direction of campaigns and how to support members. CAN members sit on campaign working groups and are able to feed into the campaign cycle to help select campaigning priorities, set objectives and evaluate progress.

EMPOWERING THE GRASSROOTS

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WE MUST HAVE THE ABILITY TO
COMMUNICATE OUR OWN MESSAGES, AND
THE FREEDOM TO TAKE POLITICAL ACTION
THAT CHALLENGES THOSE PEOPLE AND
INSTITUTIONS THAT ARE PREVENTING THE
NECESSARY CHANGE FROM HAPPENING

PROVIDING SUPPORT

All supporters regardless of experience require support. Therefore you must consider what kind of support they need (including paid staff time) and how you will provide it.

Do your resources allow you to offer intensive one-to-one support to relatively few high-level activists (those at the top of the pyramid) or limit you to servicing a national network of individuals who occasionally take action (those at the lower levels of the pyramid)? It is possible to combine these approaches, as Leonard Cheshire Disability and Breakthrough have shown.

Do you want to enable supporters to campaign on issues of importance to them at local level and or support them to take part in national campaigns?

The kind of support you provide will depend on available resources. However, you should provide these basics:

- Accessible information about the issue and campaign such as campaign packs, policy briefings etc – in electronic, printed and other formats.
- Explanation of who or what the target is and why
- Template actions to make it easy to campaign e.g. letters and emails, press releases etc
- Feedback on results of actions
- If you are encouraging networks to run their own campaigns ensure they are aware of all regulations and legislation that affect campaigning.

The Autism Action Network is a pilot initiative by the National Autistic Society. The charity is reaching out to a small number of autism groups in local communities and intensively supporting them to run campaigns on issues identified as joint priorities. The issues are ones that affect the whole autism community. In return for support from the National Autistic Society, local groups agree to share their experience and expertise with others. The goal is to build a community of autism supporters who will sustain each other to achieve change across the UK.

Some FairPensions supporters engage with pension funds by meeting them face to face rather than just sending an email. However, FairPensions does not have resources to provide support to these people so they tend to be those who already know the issues and are self-motivated.

You may need to provide training. Breakthrough and Leonard Cheshire Disability provide courses in, for example, human rights law, using the media and understanding the NHS. Katie Turner, Leonard Cheshire Disability's National Campaigns Officer, has found training gives "added confidence and skills and enables people to take the initiative".

TOP TIP

TAP INTO THE TALENTS AND INTERESTS OF YOUR SUPPORTERS

Greenpeace's campaign for Apple to be at the forefront of green technology capitalises on the creative talents of Mac users, encouraging them to download campaign footage and graphics and personalise their own video messages of support for the campaign.

ORGANISING

There are several ways to organise supporters:

- Individuals campaigning at local level
- Individuals campaigning at national level
- Groups campaigning at national, local or regional level.

Some supporters formally join a membership-based organisation; others are part of a loose network. There are pros and cons to each option. For example, group members can form durable bonds that enable them to become self-supporting but might then seek autonomy and break away from the central campaign. A network of individuals may be able to mobilise quickly to take occasional action but might lack sufficient commitment to the cause and each other to be retained. A campaign that requires large numbers of people to email their MP infrequently might prefer to develop a network of individuals, while a charity campaigning for improvements in NHS services might achieve more working with local groups. Supporting and sustaining local groups may be more time consuming than maintaining a national network of individual campaigners

USING NEW TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Developments in new technologies and social media offer more and more opportunities to reach and engage with wider audiences and get people involved in influencing the activities and decisions that affect them.

Clay Shirky, a professor at New York University who writes, teaches and consults on the social and economic effects of the internet, suggests that new technologies are empowering supporters to organise themselves into groups without the need for the framework, hierarchical communication and professional skills traditionally provided by organisations.

Online tools enable small groups to organise and publicise themselves to a greater degree than ever before, enabling campaigns which previously would not have got off the ground to see the light of day. For example, before the era of Facebook the 2009 campaign to make Rage Against the Machine number one in protest at chart dominance by winners of TV talent shows may not have progressed beyond a conversation in the pub.

Websites such as Louder.org.uk and 38 degrees are helping campaigners to self-organise and take action more easily.

Despite this shift organisations are still important in building and connecting self organised movements. But this implies VCOs giving up some control to supporters and taking a different role in the campaign. Small independent groups might spring up or choose to break away from larger 'host' campaigns, however, the knowledge, experience and contacts of larger organisations will still be as relevant as ever in the changing environment.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Your website should be a hub of information, a place to discuss ideas, and provide the means to take action. It should allow people to sign up and should link campaigners to resources and each other.

Email is fast, cheap and has instant global reach; however it does have limits. Email is not universally accessible and doesn't allow personal connections to form in the way traditional face-to-face methods do. Decision makers will also often dismiss mass email campaigns unless they have reached numbers of a scale too hard to dismiss.

Email lists are probably the most important tool for keeping in touch with supporters and recruiting new ones and can be used to mobilise supporters quickly as well as bring in donations. Barack Obama's campaign for US President utilised email lists extensively to enable people to take action.

If you only do one thing online, make sure it is building and using email lists to keep track of data on your supporters and target your messages to them.

Facebook and Twitter can be useful but don't fall into the trap of thinking you must use them. As with any other campaigning tool, only use them if your strategy requires it. The digital divide remains – if you rely exclusively on new technology you risk excluding people who do not have access to the internet or who are not confident using it.

New technologies are undoubtedly important. However, they are best used to enhance, rather than replace, real-world activity as part of an integrated campaign strategy.

IF YOU ONLY DO ONE THING ONLINE, MAKE SURE IT IS BUILDING AND USING EMAIL LISTS TO KEEP TRACK OF DATA ON YOUR SUPPORTERS AND TARGET YOUR MESSAGES TO THEM

CASE STUDY: LEONARD CHESHIRE DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY AIDERS

Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) has succeeded in marrying national staff-led policy campaigns with local user-led activism.

The charity operates two tiers of campaigning by influencing national policy and tackling local issues. The two are separate but related – the local agenda feeds into the national agenda but is independent of it. The two campaigning vehicles are a national Campaigns Network of around 7000 disabled and non-disabled people who mobilise in support of LCD’s national campaigns and a network of local independent Campaigns Action Groups (CAGs) which empower disabled people to campaign on issues that affect them in their communities e.g. pot holes in the road, inaccessible bus routes, access to shops and services.

CAMPAIGN ACTION GROUPS (CAGS)

CAGs are central to LCD’s approach to campaigning. LCD runs several hundred care homes in the UK. Many of the disabled people that used these services had already expressed an interest in becoming campaigners when the charity made the decision to develop grassroots campaigning.

LCD’s Policy & Campaigns Department worked with the organisation’s Service User Network Association to identify services where users had expressed an interest in campaigning. There are now over 30 CAGs across the country. LCD employs several Local Campaign Coordinators to support and advise them. Coordinators offer guidance, support and training so that budding campaigners understand how to devise a campaign, what a campaign action is, how the local council works etc. Each group has its own identity and leads its own agenda – the Coordinator facilitates. CAGs are at different stages in their development – some require a lot of support, others require very little guidance. In all cases Coordinators are guided by CAGs as to the level of support they want.

COMMUNITY AIDERS

Community Aiders is a CAG based in an LCD service centre in London. The group achieved success with its campaign to make local bus routes accessible to disabled people.

Members of the group would find themselves “stuck” at local bus stops because drivers would not let them board the bus. Often a buggy would occupy the space allocated for a wheelchair user and drivers would refuse to ask parents to fold the buggy away, even though wheelchair users are supposed to take priority.

Sometimes several buses would go by before Community Aiders could board.

Group members were angry and wanted to make drivers enforce rules but weren’t sure how. The Local Campaign Coordinator guided them towards Transport for London (TfL) and arranged a meeting between Community Aiders and top management. The meeting produced the idea of making a DVD for TfL to use to train bus drivers about disability access. Community Aiders featured in the DVD. The group noticed a difference in their experience of using the buses after TfL used the DVD – drivers now parents to fold buggies away to make space for wheelchair users. The group went on to advise the local fire service, police and council about disability awareness.

CAMPAIGNS NETWORK

Having a substantial number of people behind its campaigns and a collective and cohesive voice on disability issues has helped LCD lobby for changes to national policy and practice. For example, in 2008, as a result of letters sent by campaigners to MPs asking them to tackle disability poverty, the government made a specific commitment to challenge disability poverty in the UK and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) now measures disability poverty.

As part of LCD’s Now Boarding campaign to improve access to air travel for disabled passengers, campaigners were encouraged to share their experiences of using air travel. Case studies were presented to airports, air travel providers and industry bodies. Campaigners were invited to meet industry bodies and air travel providers to discuss what and how improvements in access to air travel could be made. As a result of meetings with several leading UK airports, changes to the way in which they provide assistance to disabled passengers have been made.

One of the key components against which LCD measures campaigning success is whether it has effectively facilitated the voices of beneficiaries. Strong accountability is maintained between the Campaigns Network, CAGs and service users. The Campaigns Network is regularly surveyed to find out what issues people would like to campaign on. The Campaigns Expert Reference Group – 10 experienced disabled campaigners involved in LCD’s campaigning work – meets every six months over three days to provide in-depth feedback on LCD’s national campaigns agenda.

THE CHARITY OPERATES TWO TIERS OF CAMPAIGNING BY INFLUENCING NATIONAL POLICY AND TACKLING LOCAL ISSUES

THE KEY TO OBAMA'S VICTORY WAS NOT ONLY HIS USE OF NEW MEDIA BUT TRUSTING LOCAL SUPPORTERS TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR PART OF THE CAMPAIGN

INVOLVING BENEFICIARIES

Questions of democracy, autonomy and leadership arise in relation to organising supporters. Explore to what extent supporters who are directly affected by the issues have control of the campaigning agenda:

- Are your beneficiaries supporters? What are the barriers preventing them from being involved?
- Do you support people directly affected by the issues to campaign on any issue they choose, to support a campaign you have identified, or both?
- Have you created mechanisms (e.g. surveys, conferences, committees etc) for those affected by campaigning issues to help decide which campaigns to run?
- Do you have a committee of people affected by the issue with a remit to advise on campaigning?

For more information on beneficiary voice in campaigning, please see 'Beneficiary Voice' by Ruth Mayne and Tim Gee, NCVO, 2010.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO EMPOWERING THE GRASSROOTS AND HOW CAN THEY BE OVERCOME?

SCALING BACK

Personal experience can make powerful advocates but it can also inhibit activism. A study of the father's rights movement found that some fathers wanted to campaign on behalf of others but lacked energy to do so after fighting hard to address their own problems. A member of Breakthrough CAN went into remission and no longer wished to campaign because she didn't want to be reminded of her cancer. A man with an autistic spectrum disorder found the experience of campaigning stressful and had to stop. Sometimes people need to scale back activity – make sure you are sensitive to individual needs and let people know it is OK to stop.

LETTING GO

Lack of trust can prevent empowerment. Some VCOs are fearful of handing over direct control to supporters but Leonard Cheshire Disability's campaign action groups show it is possible to 'let go' without detriment. The key to Obama's victory was not only his use of new media but trusting local supporters to take control of their part of the campaign.

If a majority of supporters are personally affected by the campaign issue, the organisation may have a duty to hand over partial control. Staff at Leonard Cheshire Disability consider it their duty to be accountable to disabled people. If supporters are motivated by a sense of injustice but are not personally affected (i.e. they do not have specific experience or expertise relevant to the campaign) the case for maintaining central control is perhaps stronger.

Other barriers include a lack of resources to provide training and other support and a lack of confidence amongst supporters. The former can be at least partially addressed by conducting a skills audit of supporters and enabling people to teach each other new skills. Find ways to build supporters' confidence e.g. be available to respond to questions, check emails before they are sent (if asked), reassure supporters they are doing well etc.

TOP TIP

BUILDING CONFIDENCE

You can build the confidence of your supporters if after giving a speech to a group you then ask them to give that same speech to the person next to them – ready to give again to their networks.

SUMMARY

- Match support to need
- Find ways to involve supporters in shaping strategy
- Trust supporters and be accountable to them

CASE STUDY: PLANE STUPID

Plane Stupid is a network of grassroots groups which take non-violent direct action against aviation expansion. It is not a charity. Some methods used by Plane Stupid are illegal. Charity Commission guidance is clear that charities must never break the law when campaigning in pursuit of charitable objectives. Whilst you will not want to emulate illegal methods however, it is worth reflecting on how Plane Stupid mobilises supporters.

Plane Stupid organises “horizontally, by consensus and without leaders” to ensure every individual who is affiliated to Plane Stupid can have a say in the direction of the campaign and is supported to participate. It reaches out beyond its natural supporter base to find new campaigners who otherwise would not get involved.

By not appointing or electing leaders Plane Stupid strives to operate democratically. Supported participation is the goal i.e. staff and experienced supporters put consistent effort into creating opportunities for supporters to have a voice and to develop skills to enable anyone to step into a temporary leadership role.

Plane Stupid holds two National Gatherings every year where supporters come together to discuss strategies, ideas and actions. Anyone who wants to can put an item on the agenda. Decision making is by consensus – there are no votes. Individuals can veto a proposal if they are against it but in practice this rarely happens because the culture is such that people try to find solutions that all can support.

It is arguable that any organisation operates effectively without leadership or coordination. Plane Stupid does not have leaders i.e. there are no individuals who take decisions and lead others on a permanent or long-term basis.

Instead, anyone who wants to is encouraged to take on a leadership role whether as a media spokesperson or a local group coordinator or something else. No one performs the same role for long and if one person is beginning to dominate, steps are taken for him or her to pass on skills to others so leadership roles can be shared.

Plane Stupid is best known for its direct action to prevent a third runway at Heathrow. Direct action is sometimes misunderstood – it is a philosophy based on empowering people to take action for themselves rather than looking to others to do it for them. That philosophy underpins Plane Stupid’s Adopt a Resident scheme – established supporters link up with local people who are affected by the Heathrow plans and want to challenge them. Supporters develop close relationships with residents and support them to take action to save homes and villages. People who would never have dreamed of becoming activists are encouraged and supported to get involved. Adopt a Resident has also taken root in Manchester and Scotland.

The key lesson from Plane Stupid is to see the organisation as a facilitator of supported participation rather than a leader setting the agenda for others.

THE KEY LESSON FROM PLANE STUPID IS TO SEE THE ORGANISATION AS A FACILITATOR OF SUPPORTED PARTICIPATION RATHER THAN A LEADER SETTING THE AGENDA FOR OTHERS.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

PARTICIPANT AT BOND HOW DO WE MOBILISE?
ACTIVIST SESSION, 7 NOVEMBER 2009

WE ARE DISEMPOWERED
WHEN NGOS SEE US AS
CONSUMERS NOT AS PEOPLE

As with any venture, there are challenges and risks associated with mobilising supporters. Some organisations worry supporters will go 'off message', lead with personal agendas or employ poor campaigning tactics which bring the organisation into disrepute. Others recruit a large supporter base then end up creating actions to keep people busy. This is counterproductive – supporters know when they are asked to take meaningless actions and the people targeted by action will not think well of an organisation that bombards them for the sake of it.

Know the risks and seek to manage them but do not try to remove risk altogether. Conduct a risk assessment – it sounds managerial and complicated but simply means listing everything that could go wrong, estimating the level of risk (high, medium or low) and working out what you can do to reduce it.

RISK MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

- Think before you recruit: do you really need supporters? Don't recruit for the sake of it and end up having to service a redundant network.
- Manage expectations about what supporters will be doing and the support they can expect. Some charities publish charters to accomplish this.
- Provide training to minimise the risk of poor campaigning.
- Ensure campaign actions are meaningful and are part of the overall strategy.
- When action is not appropriate, don't stop communicating with supporters – explain why there are no actions right now and offer other ways to get involved.

CONCLUSION

MOBILISING SUPPORTERS IS ONE CAMPAIGNING TACTIC AMONGST MANY. IF IT IS AN APPROPRIATE METHOD FOR YOUR CAMPAIGN IT CAN BE A POWERFUL WAY TO ACHIEVE CHANGE.

REMEMBER...

- Make sure your campaign is targeted and relevant
- Target potential recruits who are likely to be sympathetic to your cause but try to break out of recruiting just the 'usual suspects' and identify why certain groups who are affected by your campaign are not engaging
- Make campaigning easily accessible and provide ways for everyone to contribute
- Trust your supporters and provide help to build confidence and skills
- Be aware of risks but not paralysed by them.

WHAT NEXT?

Bond provide training and further support in this area, visit their website for more information www.bond.org.uk

Join Forum for Change Inspiring Supporter Action group www.forumforchange.org.uk/group/inspiringsupporteraction to discuss and share resources in this area with other campaigners.

For more campaigning resources visit Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigning-resources

Louder.org.uk can help you turn web-surfing into activism. In just a few clicks you can have a targeted set of tools to run your campaign and turn your supporters into activists and is completely free. www.louder.org.uk

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This guide is based on a literature review, notes from a recent conference convened by Bond – the UK membership body for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in international development – and a small number of qualitative interviews with charities and campaigning groups who have in different ways demonstrated how involving people in your campaigns can achieve results. Below is a list of sources consulted during the literature review:

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