

Mobilise support

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Mobilise Support has been written by Beverley Duckworth, Advocacy and Campaigns Consultant.

'Many hands make light work' the saying goes, and fortunately this can be true of campaigning. When over half a million people spoke out in different ways against the plans to sell off national woodland in 2011, the Government was quick to respond to the public mood and drop its policy.

Winning campaigns can often be long and challenging though, which means that enlisting the support of 'many hands' is all the more critical. However tenacious and passionate you are, you're unlikely to achieve your campaign goals on your own. But if there are lots of individuals or groups actively supporting your campaign, it provides legitimacy, and makes it harder for those you are trying to influence to ignore you.

Working with others in a network, alliance or coalition can be a good way to increase your voice, credibility and reach. The Arms Trade Treaty, which was adopted by 154 Governments in April 2013, was a huge victory achieved by several organisations campaigning together in coalition for many years.

Building and mobilising a supporter base can also help propel your campaign from an unknown issue to one that is being spoken about in the corridors of power. For example, when women who were receiving death threats via Twitter spoke out publicly, and an online Twitter petition was started, #TwitterSilence became a top trending topic in the UK and Twitter was forced to announce new rules on abusive tweets and introduce an "in-tweet" report button.

Not all campaigns need public support to achieve success, however. In fact sometimes it can be counter-productive, so before embarking on a mobilisation

drive make sure you step back and assess what benefit it could actually bring for your campaign.

Building your supporter base

Building a strong and active supporter base can be key to winning campaigns. Here are some top tips to help you on your way

Supporter-centred approach

If you approach contact with supporters, or potential supporters as a two way conversation (rather than telling people what to do), they are likely to feel more ownership of the campaign and may commit more time and energy to your cause. Encourage creativity and watch new ideas emerge and gain life - amazing things can happen when people feel empowered to take their own form of action.

Segmentation

Give people a range of ways to support your campaign. Some of the people who back you might be highly committed and willing to do a lot towards helping you achieve your campaign goals. Others may have far less time. In leading a campaign the trick is to ensure that you capitalise on whatever level of support people are willing to give to you – whether it's sending a quick email or staffing a stall.

Segmenting your audience can help with this. NCVO's '[The Good Campaigns Guide](#)' suggests that you segment your supporters into:

1. **Advocates** – highly committed supporters who can act as ambassadors for the campaign by, for example, visiting MPs. They can also act as 'multipliers' by mobilising others to get involved. (They are likely to be a small proportion of your supporter base).
2. **Supporters** – those who are interested in the campaign and willing to occasionally take a lower level action like signing petitions, donating to your campaign or even writing to their MP. (They are likely to be a larger proportion of your supporter base).
3. **Joiners** – those who are only willing to take a symbolic 'joining' action as they

don't have the time to do more, or are wary of getting involved in something they see as too 'political'.

While segmenting might sound like a complex process, it can be done simply. On your website, in sign-up leaflets or other resources and materials you use, you can simply give people different options about how they can get or stay involved.

Communication

Segmenting your supporters also enables you to communicate with them appropriately. Campaigns can be won or lost on the quality of communication.

Ten top tips are to make sure that you:

- Think about whether email, social media or mailings are the best mode of communication for your different target audiences;
- Have a supporter journey mapped out; Use the [AIDA model](#) (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) to structure your communication.
- Keep your message simple;
- Use a mix of narrative, facts and pictures to get your message across, as people respond to different things;
- Use personal stories that people can relate to;
- Frame your campaign in a powerful way - think David and Goliath!
- Stand out from the crowd, by being creative in your approach;
- Feedback on successes to keep supporters motivated - show them they are making a difference.
- Regularly test and adapt accordingly. Whether its split testing of mailings or monitoring your click through rates, gathering feedback will help you improve your communications.

For more tips on effective campaign communication, see '[How to create an effective campaign](#)' in Third Sector.

The 80-20 rule

A top tip from Greenpeace's [Mobilisation Lab](#) is to spend more time building and nurturing relationships with existing supporters than looking for new ones, as they can open doors for you and introduce you to others. Often the majority of campaign supporters are lapsed or inactive – so it's worth developing a plan to reactivate them. [Fairsay](#) have some useful advice on how to do this.

Case study

Lucy Holmes started the [No More Page 3](#) campaign when she bought the Sun the day after Jessica Ennis had won her gold Olympic medal, and saw that the largest female image was still of a topless woman. The petition she started got 170 signatures in its first day and the total now stands at well over 120,000. In order to build the support base and raise the profile of the campaign she has regularly used a diverse range of social media to keep the campaign alive, including Twitter, Facebook and blogging. She has also encouraged people to make it their own campaign by using their talents to spread the word.

Does your campaign need support - or not?

Assess the pros and cons of trying to get public support for your campaign.

It seems intuitive to try to build public support for your campaign. And while it can be very useful in helping meet your campaign goals, you do need to step back and assess what benefit (and potential drawbacks) it could actually bring.

Some of the things you need to ask yourself are:

[Q] Will increased public support increase my influence on the decision-makers?

According to NCVO's ['The Good Campaigns Guide'](#) "...the extent of a positive correlation between mass opinion and institutional action can be hazy. The unprecedented size of the anti-war in Iraq march in February 2003 and the Government decision to act notwithstanding is just one, high profile...example".

[Q] Are there other and more (cost) effective ways to achieve my goals?

For example, while the [Campaign for Freedom of Information](#) does try to mobilise support from the public (e.g. asking supporters to write to their MP), much more of their work goes on without any direct involvement from their supporters – for example, through lobby meetings and responding to Government consultations.

[Q] Could public support actually backfire against my campaign?

If the government (or your target) is sympathetic to your cause but the public mood is not, the media and public opposition which a high profile campaign would attract may go against you. If your target needs persuading and you only get a small amount of support, it might be worse than having none at all! A handful of people on a demo, or a petition with only a few signatures might just evidence to others how little support there is for your position.

[Q] Do I have the time and resources to mobilise effectively?

Building public support can be time consuming and expensive, so do bear this in mind. Thankfully, many successful campaigns have been run on a shoe string through clever use of social media.

Remember that, even if you do manage to mobilise public opinion, there is a question about quality vs quantity. As with online petitions, getting 5,000 people to send pre-printed postcards to an MP in support of your campaign, might not be as effective as getting 50 people to write a letter in their own words to that same MP.

Working in collaboration

Campaigners working together send out a powerful message, and can be more effective.

Working with others can give your campaign a louder voice as well as more credibility and reach. Whether you form a loose network or build a more formal coalition, it will give you strength in numbers, a variety of skills to draw on and more contacts to help achieve success.

When different groups come together on a single issue, like the Lobbying Bill, it evidences consensus - that 'despite our differences here is an issue that we all feel strongly about'. Through coordinated action, it means that your voice will be heard in places you might not be able to access by yourself.

Case Study

It takes time, commitment and compromise to build a successful campaign coalition, but the results can be more than worth it. The Grocery Market Action Group was set up to [campaign for a supermarket watchdog](#), to stop large

supermarket chains using their power to bully suppliers. A diverse range of organisations were involved, including ActionAid, Traidcraft, the National Farmers Union, the British Independent Fruit Growers Association and Friends of the Earth. Each organisation had its own policy focus, supporter base and people in Government that they know. Through aligning their messages, and coordinating approaches to the relevant decision-makers the campaign was more than the sum of its parts. The coalition built up cross party support and, against all the odds, succeeded in getting a watchdog with the power to fine supermarkets in December 2012.

Working in collaboration does need to be carefully managed - NCVO's ['Effecting Change through Campaigning in Collaboration'](#) and 'The Good Campaigns Guide' both provide some useful tips on this.