

What place for the public in political campaigning for charities?

The Charity Commission defines campaigning in two ways: firstly, raising public awareness of a particular issue and influencing **public opinion**; secondly, political activity to influence **government policy or legislation**. Here we focus on the second kind of campaigning, and the question of involving the public for the purpose of influencing policy or legislation. Of course, it's important to note that these two kinds of campaigning are by no means mutually exclusive, and often run hand in hand.

Before starting to look at who campaigns, and how charities can most successfully engage campaigners, we must first address the question of why charities should involve the public in their campaigning at all.

Why engage the public in your political campaigning?

Firstly, charities should consider involving the public in their campaigning because the public are sympathetic towards charities campaigning. 56% of the public identify 'lobbying government and other organisations' as a worthwhile activity for charities, only 16% think it is wasteful¹. 67% agree that '... charities should be able to campaign to change laws and government policies relevant to their work', and only 2% identify campaigning as a barrier to giving (worrying, offputting or irritating)².

Furthermore, not only is the public positive about charities campaigning, MPs are too, and they're keen to see charities getting the public on board. 86% agreed with the statement 'I think charities should be able to campaign to change laws and government policies relevant to their work'.³ And when asked how they would spend a public affairs budget of a few thousand pounds if they worked for a charity, 45% chose 'encouraging the public to lobby their MP' among their top two responses, making it the second most popular option.⁴ This enthusiasm for public involvement in charity campaigning reflects the 2006 Commons Modernisation Committee report, which recommended that, whenever possible, the public should have the opportunity to become involved in the legislative process as 'active participants'.

However, to make public involvement really worthwhile, we must be convinced that it works. Measuring the impact of a campaign, and tracking the influence of public campaigning on any outcomes achieved, is not a simple business- we can focus on laws and policies changed, but this may ignore where progress has been made towards a longer term goal.

¹ 1,000 adults 16+, Britain, Charity Awareness Monitor, Sep 08, nfpSynergy.

² 1,000 adults 16+, Britain, Charity Awareness Monitor, Jul 09, nfpSynergy.

³ 150 MPs, Charity Parliamentary Monitor, Nov 07, nfpSynergy.

⁴ 150 MPs, Charity Parliamentary Monitor, Nov 08, nfpSynergy.

We must not forget that the campaign to abolish the slave trade took 50-100 years to achieve its aims. Engaging the public in campaigning is likely to be part of a broader strategy, and the impact of each type of campaigning may not always be clear cut and identifiable.

Nevertheless, many successful campaigns have included large scale public involvement in campaigning. As many as 300,000 people boycotted West Indian slave sugar in 1791, underlining that public involvement in campaigning is by no means a new phenomenon. In July 1913, 50,000 women took part in a pilgrimage organised by the National Union of Women Suffrage Societies to Hyde Park as part of the campaign for Votes for Women. More recently, CancerCampaigns (a coalition involving CRUK plus range of smaller cancer charities) mobilised over 17,000 emails in early 2008, which led to improvements in cancer screening. The Every Disabled Child Matters campaign enlisted the support of 29,000 individuals, while the Jubilee 2000 campaign gathered over 24 million signatures from 166 countries to urge world leaders to Drop the Debt. Although around \$375 billion of debt remain for the poorest 49 countries in the world, \$88 billion has been wiped off the total through debt cancellation schemes. In July 2005, over 225,000 people took to the streets of Edinburgh to call on world leaders to act at the G8 summit, as part of the Make Poverty History movement. A striking feature of these campaigns and many others with considerable public involvement is the participation of multiple charities or organisations, working in coalition to achieve shared aims.

Who gets involved in campaigning on behalf of charities?

If we accept that involving the public is a worthwhile way for charities to campaign, who should they target with their 'ask'? The good news for charities is that most people have, at some point, done some kind of campaigning on behalf of a charity. 75% of the public have campaigned on behalf of a charity (undertaken one or more of the 14 campaigning activities prompted in our survey)⁵. Only 9% haven't done any of these campaigning activities and wouldn't be interested in doing any, meaning charities have over 90% of the public to play for.

Perhaps the bad news is that for many, their campaigning action was no more strenuous than petition signing- 72% have signed a petition, 28% sent a campaigning postcard, but only 3% have visited their MP⁶. However, for all the activities with low participation rates, 25-50% of respondents were willing to consider taking the action- there is much scope for charities to widen involvement in campaigning and translate interest into action.

⁵ 1,000 adults 16+, Britain, Charity Awareness Monitor, Jul 09, nfpSynergy.

⁶ 1,000 adults 16+, Britain, Charity Awareness Monitor, Jul 09, nfpSynergy.

So which groups are most likely to campaign? When it comes to any campaigning action, involvement in charity campaigning is much broader than traditional political engagement (those who are 'very likely to vote' if there was a General Election tomorrow), encompassing more women (voting is more popular among men) and all age groups (by contrast, 16-24s are almost half as likely to intend to vote as over 65). Donors and higher social grades are both more likely to intend to vote and to have campaigned, although the social grade pattern is more pronounced for voting. This confirms a broader reason for involving the public in your campaigning- in an age of declining involvement in formal political participation (voting, trade unions, political parties etc.), charity campaigning helps to increase democratic participation among groups that may not engage in traditional ways. Furthermore, data from our Youth Engagement Monitor indicates that 11-16 year olds, despite not being able to vote, are almost as likely as the adult population to have signed a petition (50% v 72%) and four times more likely to have sent a campaigning text than adults (16% v 4%)⁷.

In order to analyse which groups are getting involved in specific types of campaigning, we combined campaigning by different methods (petitions, email, writing, attending, telephoning and postcard/text message) and looked at which demographic groups were most likely to be participating in each way. Across the board, donors were more likely to be involved in all these methods of campaigning, suggesting that financial supporters may be the first port of call to find committed campaigners. Women were more likely to be petition signers than men, whereas there is no gender gap for other types of campaigning. Older age groups are more likely to campaign by writing or attending than younger people, while middle age groups are more likely than others to campaign by email.

Across all types of campaigning, DE groups (semi-skilled and unskilled workers & state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers) are among the least likely to have campaigned. For attending actions (demonstrations, public meetings, visiting an MP) AB social grades (higher or intermediate managerial, administrative or professional) stand out as most engaged.

Moving beyond what the public are currently doing, we find that different demographic groups show interest in different campaigning activities. Donors are more likely to consider doing any campaigning activity, as well as being more likely to have already campaigned. However, other demographic patterns are less predictable: there is most interest in postcard signing among C2 social grades (skilled manual workers) and under 45s, under 35s are most interested in a public demonstration, 55-64s are keen on emailing a company or international organization or body, while 25-45s are the age group most likely to be interested in writing

⁷ 1,000 11-25 year olds, Britain, Youth Engagement Monitor, May 09, nfpSynergy.

to the local, regional or national press. More men than women are interested in demonstrating, telephoning or visiting their MP.⁸

How to engage the public in successful campaigning action?

Having identified the groups currently campaigning for charities and interested in doing so, we must then consider the question of how to effectively engage them in a particular campaign. There are two important elements to this question- firstly, mobilising the public to support you through campaigning, and secondly, using their support in an effective way to influence policy makers, by channelling the public's campaigning into the most impactful actions.

Mobilising support is at least in part a case of building and harnessing the motivation to campaign, and motivation is likely to be influenced both by trust and a sense of engagement in the issues charities are working in. We know from the Charity Awareness Monitor that many charity issues engender high levels of concern, and charities themselves attract high levels of trust, particularly compared with political institutions such as the Government and political parties⁹.

But beyond this, does the public think their campaigning will make a difference and help change things for the better? Our data shows that just over half of respondents consider petition signing effective, while around a third of the public believe in the effectiveness of the other campaigning activities prompted. Text messaging is the exception here, thought likely to help change things for the better by just 15%. These figures show that many people are not yet doing activities they think would make a difference- charities need to encourage the public to give it a go.

So assuming you have a motivated group of supporters ready to campaign, what are the best tactics to give maximum bang for your buck? Different campaigns will target different political actors, depending on where decision-making power lies. Where MPs are the key target, results from our Charity Parliamentary Monitor indicate that a focus on the constituency is a way to maximise impact- 39% of MPs surveyed chose 'correspondence in my constituency' as one of the three most influential ways to be contacted by charities, followed by 'event in my constituency' (37%) and 'constituency business' (36%), compared with 27% for 'correspondence at Westminster. Hansard Society research has found that being lobbied by constituents can have a greater impact on an MP than being lobbied by a

⁸ 1,000 adults 16+, Britain, Charity Awareness Monitor, Jul 09, nfpSynergy.

⁹ 1,000 adults 16+, Britain, Charity Awareness Monitor, Jul 09, nfpSynergy.

pressure group.¹⁰In terms of methods for reaching this group, our research suggests that MPs are divided about the impact of campaigning postcards, with some finding them highly effective and others purposefully ignoring them. Bringing campaigners to Westminster is another way to make an impact, as with Breakthrough Breast Cancer's annual 'Westminster Fly-In', a training and lobbying event for local members. Diabetes UK's schoolchildren with diabetes campaign, which involved 200 children with diabetes attending a lobby of Parliament at Westminster, was commended by a number of MPs in our research. One Conservative MP described it as "a text book case of how to do it. Impressive and effective". For a fuller discussion of these results, see our previous insight, '[Campaigning at Westminster](#)'. In terms of maximising the impact of campaigning through involving as many people as possible, working in coalition with other charities may be appropriate where there is agreement among charities on the policy outcomes desired- we have seen that many of the campaigns involving wide-scale public involvement were carried out in coalition.

In conclusion, the public should not be ignored as a key resource in campaigning, but need a targeted prompt from charities to encourage them to get involved, and to be channelled into campaigning in the most effective ways to ensure their efforts yield the best outcomes for the charity's service users.

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¹⁰ G. Rosenblatt (2006), *A Year in the Life: from member of public to Member of Parliament* (London: Hansard Society), p. 40, cited in 'LAW IN THE MAKING: A discussion paper', by A Brazier, S Kalitowski and G Rosenblatt