

Learning material for the Online activism workshop

1. Planning your online campaign

All campaigning is about communicating and all communication is about influencing (and being influenced by) other people. While campaigning in yesterday's society may have been a one-way activity, successful campaigning today almost always includes a two-way communication process. In building a strategy, four very basic questions need to be asked:

1. What do you want to change?
2. Who has the power to make that change?
3. What can convince them to make the change?
4. What should you do to convince them?

Your online campaigning should be treated as any typical campaign. For a campaign to succeed, you need a campaign communication plan with the following necessary elements:

- Clearly define what you want to achieve
- Know who your audiences are. Who do you want to influence? Why? How much power do they have to help you achieve the change that you want to happen?
- Be very clear in your message
- Be very creative and innovative when you choose the channels and tools to communicate your message.

A communication plan in a campaign is important because it will: • Guide how you will implement your campaign • Make it easier for you to track your campaign performance • Make it easier for you to make changes to your campaign • Give you a picture of the different ways or tools to communicate your campaign

2. The campaign communication template

To start planning your online campaign, we recommend using a communication template. This will help you answer some important questions about your campaign. This will also guide you to design your online campaign. Here are some basic elements of a campaign communication template:

1. Clearly define what you want to achieve by having a clear set of goals and objectives

The campaign goal is the “big” change that you want to achieve over a relatively longer period of time and usually described in very ambitious language. A campaign may have one or several goals depending on the scale and magnitude of your campaign. If you have more than one goal make sure that they are related. Many organisations nowadays are already very familiar with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) objectives. In this example, the objective is very specific about what it wants to achieve (village and religious leaders will sign a covenant), measurable (x number of village and religious leaders), achievable and realistic (if based on an assessment by the group), and time-bound (“in one year’s time”).

2. Knowing who your audiences are

Campaign audiences can be categorised either as “decision makers” or “opinion or influence formers”. Decision makers are people who have the formal mandate and power to enact the change that you want to achieve. These could be elected officials or appointed officials in the government or non-state actors such as religious or community leaders (in situations where the state has relegated certain functions to regulate and implement laws according to customs or religion), or leaders of an armed rebel group in situations where formal government functions no longer exist.

Opinion or influence formers are individuals or groups who may have no formal authority or power but are nonetheless influential. These could be your allies or your adversaries – people or institutions who are opposed to your agenda because it conflicts with their interests. Your campaign plan has to reflect who are the decision makers and the opinion/influence formers you want to reach, and who you aim to reach first and later. In order to reach a particular decision maker you may have to work through an influential person or institution first. Or you may have to reach both the decision makers and the influential but adversarial groups around them at the same time. It is very important to note that those who will benefit from your campaign, e.g. the women in the communities, can also become a very influential campaign voice. Always include in your campaign plan how to build their capacities and enable them to become an important part of your campaign.

3. Be very clear in your message

Your campaign communication plan needs to formulate very explicitly what your key messages are. These messages must be distinct, clear, succinct and explicit and are directly linked to your goals and objectives. They should contain the following:

- What is the problem?
- What solution are you proposing?
- What action do you want your allies and targets to take?

4. Be very creative and innovative when you choose the channels and tools to communicate your message

When campaigners want to influence a decision maker, they have basically two options:

Direct influence An example of this is lobbying with authorities

Indirect influence Where one turns to a part of the “public” to gain support for one’s case, as in alliance building and public-opinion building.

The channels and tools to communicate your campaign agenda and objectives can take the form of real or face-to-face activities, or virtual activities, through the internet.

When you select the forms or channels to communicate your campaign it is important to consider the following questions:

- What tools/channels are accessible and available to you and your allies?
- What tools/channels will reach your priority audiences?
- What tools/channels will widen the reach of your campaign?

3 . Online campaigning: Creating your campaign's online identity

What is an online identity?

We are constantly faced with questions that partly reveal our “identity” – who we are.

What is your name? Where are you from? Who are your friends? Who is your family? What is your job? What is your address? What do you do?

On the internet, these identity markers are just as important. They allow other people online to identify you and to connect with you. Without an online identity you will not be able to interact with other people on the internet.

Your online identity is the name and character you build for yourself on the internet. It is determined by various pieces of information and content, such as:

- Your name (or the name that you use online)
- Your email address
- The images that point to you
- Your location
- Your sex/gender
- Your interests.

Creating a campaign identity is important to distinguish your campaign from others. It allows your campaign to have spaces on different social networking sites and interact with potential supporters for your cause.

To set up your online campaigning spaces, your campaign will need :

- A name
- A description
- An email account

3.2. Naming your campaign

There are three main things to remember when you develop your campaign's name:

The main title of your campaign

The name, as much as possible, must be based on the goals and key messages of your campaign. It must capture the imagination of the public, especially whom you want to influence with what your campaign is all about.

Your campaign's slogan

This is the text that usually follows the title of your campaign and which further describes what the campaign is trying to achieve. This is optional.

Short name(s) of your campaign

This is the nickname of your campaign. There can be more than one short name for your campaign. It can be the acronym of your campaign name or short words to describe your campaign name or slogan. To determine your campaign's name think about the following considerations:

Easy recall

Your campaign's name must be easy to remember. This can be done in different ways:

- It must make sense in a few words. Your campaign name must capture the important points about your campaign (such as the main issue, the action that you want your allies and targets to do, etc.) so that other people will know what it is about. But you have to be able to do this with just a few words. If your campaign name is too long and too descriptive you will have lost other people's attention even before they finish reading your name.
- It must strike a balance between familiarity and uniqueness. Your campaign name must be unique but at the same time it cannot be so unique that no one understands what it is.
- It must be interesting. Your campaign name should encourage other people to know more about it. So it is good practice not to give out all of your campaign information at once. But you will have to phrase your words in such a way that other people will want to know more. Association Your campaign name should be something that your targets and allies can connect with. In order to be relatable to your targets and allies you will need to understand them and ensure that:
 - It uses familiar words. You should not use words that your allies and targets do not understand. If possible, do not use jargon or acronyms in your campaign's name. If your targets and allies are unable to understand your campaign name then it would be hard for them to want to join your campaign.
 - It evokes a feeling. Your campaign's name must be able to make people feel something.
 - It is action-based. Your campaign's name must be able to say what main action you want your allies and targets to take.

Be easy to translate Since you are planning an online campaign your campaign has the potential to reach a global audience. In designing your campaign's name you have to use words that are easy to translate.

Things to watch out for...

However, social networking has certain limitations that may pose challenges to your campaign:

Turning online support into real action

One of the biggest challenges in online campaigning is ensuring that online activities have impact on the ground. The use of social networking does not ensure that the people who support your cause on Facebook will join you when you need to take a piece of legislation to your lawmakers. Nor will having many followers on Twitter necessarily mean that you have as many supporters when you need people to volunteer to organise relief work.

Loss of control over your content

Because social networking makes it easy for people to comment on your information, tag it and share it with their own networks, you can not be assured that the content you publish on these sites will be represented according to your design. Misrepresentation of your campaign is always a drawback in campaigning through social networking platforms, especially if you have no full control over its content. Furthermore, it will also make it easier for your opponents, or people who have the opposite view from you, to feedback on your campaign negatively (maybe even try to ruin your campaign's image).

Decreased security

One of the dangers of using online spaces is that it gives people a false sense of security. Many believe that just because you are running an online campaign you can be less careful about what you publish. In fact, risks to your campaign can be enhanced in online campaigning because you will have very little control over who can see your campaign and where your campaign messages will be published.

Competition

Other campaigns are also using social networking to reach a broader audience. This means that your campaign will be competing with other campaigns for support. This means that you will have to commit to maintaining your social networking spaces as long as your campaign goals and objectives allow you to.