



Winning Resources and Support *Making Your Campaigning Count*

Terry

Welcome to this podcast on campaigning in a fundraising context. I'm Terry O'Sullivan, Chair of *B625 Winning Resources and Support*. Fundraisers use the word 'campaign' to describe a joined up series of activities with a distinct aim in mind. So for example people talk about a capital fundraising campaign for a new building that might last for several years and involve a number of coordinated approaches to different groups of donors. A common feature of such campaigns is that they reach out to new donor groups not just the existing supporter base of an organisation.

But there's a second sense in which voluntary groups and charities use the term 'campaigns'. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations defines it like this: 'Organised actions around a specific issue seeking to bring about changes in the policy and behaviours of institutions and/or specific public groups.' One might add 'of individuals' as well, if you think about things like healthy eating campaigns which aim to change us one by one. In the past, many charities have been wary of campaigning because of the danger of straying beyond their essential purposes into what could be regarded as political activity. But for some charities, notably the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children or The Childrens Society, working for change in attitudes and policies is central to their mission even though it can land them in some controversial situations.

Whether you are working for funds, or for change, or for both, the job involves influencing people and achieving measurable impact. But what are the secrets of winning this kind of support? How can smaller organisations with a point to make punch above their weight in order to create maximum impact? And how can we evaluate campaigning activity? These are some of the questions we will be exploring in this podcast.

I'm joined by Chris Stalker, head of Campaigning Effectives at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations.

Chris, can you start by describing some of the things organisations aim to achieve by campaigning, and how they set about doing it?

Chris

I think there are a number of different types of campaigning and by that, I think it's important to determine that we're talking about influencing decision makers in relation to social and political change.

Probably three main types, I think. Firstly, the extent to which charities and non-governmental organizations directly influence institutional policy and practice change and by that, we mean government but also businesses and the private sector as well.

Second to the three is public knowledge, public attitude, public behaviour and public opinion. And the extent to which charities organised their resources in order to influence targeted segments of the public.

And the third one is a combination of the first two, which is in the liberal democracy, the extent to which charities engage with the public in order to demonstrate that the public have a particular concern about a particular issue and apply public pressure directly on opinion formers and decision makers to bring about political change.

So, I think those are the main three.

Terry

Could you give us some examples?

Chris

Yeah. When I was at Oxfam for example, in the 1990s, Oxfam at any one time, particularly in the mid-1990s, we're running four campaigns and I think that's quite typical of many charities and NGOs that they wrote run a number of social and political campaigns simultaneously and then judiciously make choices about how and where to deploy resources across those four depending on the external environment.

But, four, perhaps, particular campaigns to draw out, because they were quite different in terms of their strategy and their targeting of who Oxfam were trying to change and what they were trying to achieve on behalf of beneficiaries.

Firstly, international debt cancellation and what they were trying to achieve there was debt cancellation for the poor countries and the targets were international financial institutions. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Secondly, arms, small arms export controls and specific targeting of the UK government requiring a different set of strategies and tactics.

Thirdly, supporting and upholding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. A particular challenge at the time, as you may recall in relation to public opinion, in relation to refugees and asylum seekers.

And fourthly, and again, targeted at more of the public, fair trade and trying to encourage members of the public in terms of behavioural change to buy more fair traded products, coffee, tea, bananas, that sort of thing.

Four campaigns running simultaneously but needing careful management across the four and within four, because they are four very different political targets and all, if not some of them, you know, have a fair degree of social marketing.

Terry

What are the success factors that contribute to effective campaigning?

Chris

In terms of success factors, of a good campaign as it develops and as it's being planned. I think, there are a number of important principles.

You know, the first being absolutely clear about what you're trying to achieve. And building in an evaluation process even right at the beginning and testing the extent to which those objectives that have been identified have been achieved.

Other principles, I think, if I could just pick out two more that I think are really important.

Firstly, ensuring that you have a -- that an organisation has a very clear route to change. Very clearly identified process within which they want to try to influence decision makers.

You know, a well-developed understanding of what will influence targets, whether they're political targets or whether they're target audiences, target publics.

And the second and final principle, I think, is and this is quite challenging, I think, for many organisations but having the confidence to sometimes decrease the resources that you apply to a campaign.

It doesn't necessarily have to be running at a full capacity all the time. Good campaigns, in my experience, anyway have natural peaks and troughs of activity.

Terry

What kind of tensions, if any, do you see between fundraising and other kinds of campaigning work?

Chris

At the outset, it is probably worth saying that in many charities, small charities particularly, these, sometimes, are indistinguishable disciplines and that often, it's the same individual working on fundraising, policy, research, campaigning, parliamentary and press.

However, for large organisations, medium and large-sized charities and non-governmental organisations, my experience is that there is a fair degree of tension, because I do think that they are two fundamentally different disciplines with very different objectives.

Some of the methodologies and some of the approaches might be similar in terms of identifying clarity of objectives and target audiences and I think, increasingly, I hope a discipline, certainly we're trying to instil within campaigners that, I think fundraisers have had, for a long time, which is assessing the return on investment of resources.

Now that return may be different, it's not a fiscal return in campaigning terms, but it might be a policy change or degree of policy change. And I think there are some, therefore – using that as an example – some similarities, between fundraising and campaigning.

And there may be some convergence as well, at a kind of low common denominator level, I think, about organisational positioning and brand, which is helpful in both terms, both income generating terms, but also in political positioning for campaigning terms.

However, in my experience, and I'll give you an example, one of the tensions that manifests itself is the use and mobilisation of supporters and donors in that, my experience is, from a campaigning perspective, that fundraisers are quite naturally and understandably nervous about a campaigning ask, 'write to your MP about this particular issue', if that through testing that, that particular campaign action may suppress income from those same supporters.

Of course, it is important to say that without fundraising, campaigners couldn't do the work that they do as well, I think.

Terry

Have you got any examples of how organisations can manage tensions like that successfully?

Chris

I think, it's only through successful negotiation internally and you know, there are some examples of where those sorts of tensions have been managed through organisational development and even restructuring so that there is one, you know, command and control over those different disciplines.

I think, the ways that organisations have reconciled those tensions have been largely around brand and positioning. So, the example, I suppose, that is quite well-known would be the Full Stop, NSPCCs Full Stop campaign, which was primarily around generating income, getting new supporters into the organisation, who would then be mobilised subsequently to take action to try and protect children against cruelty.

Terry

How can smaller charities and voluntary organisations punch above their weight in getting noticed and creating impact?

Chris

My experience is that large does not necessarily equate to impact; just because an organisation has greater resources doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to use them in the most effective way.

It may well be that because the organisation is smaller, their resources are finite and they have to think and they do think more carefully about the way in which they deploy their resources. And those principles that we've talked about earlier, about being clear about what you want to achieve, identifying very clearly who the decision makers are, building coherent strategies to try and influence those decision makers, and also having the flexibility and agility of a small organisation, means that they have much more impact.

Terry

I'm particularly interested in ways in which charities and other voluntary organisations can use collaboration to make more impact. Have you got any examples of that working in practice?

Chris

Working in collaboration, which manifests itself in a number of different ways (strategic alliances, campaign coalitions, even loose networks) is really interesting and a very important trend, I think. In that, increasingly, organisations, I think, have realised that to maximize their resources, maximize their potential for impact, they're not necessarily going to do that in isolation and they need to work with partner organisations as part of wider civil society in order to influence change effectively.

And you only have to look at a number of quite diverse issues to see that almost all of those issues, stop climate chaos, Jubilee debt coalition, land mines coalition that campaigned together, many different issues now have coalitions at their heart in terms of the way that the sectors working together.

I think that's a really interesting trend. It presents different challenges.

I mean, in some respects, you'd think on the face of it, that's a very positive thing. But hidden within that, can come some quite significant transaction costs. And by that, I mean the negotiations the different organisations then have to

have between themselves in order to agree any particular agreed policy position, for example.

The other thing I'll just add as well to campaign coalitions alliances and networks is some of the most effective coalitions and alliances have been cross-sectoral.

And by that, I mean, they're not just within the charity and NGO sector. They can also bring in other sectors. Faith organisations, trade unions, being two examples.

Terry

What would you say are the secrets of using the media effectively?

Chris

I'm not sure that there are any particular secrets!

Most media strategies have two elements to them and it's important for an organisation and the campaign's managers to think about two elements.

Firstly, is the proactive and by that, that is the way in which an organisation, perhaps working with partners, places media stories at particular times to try and influence opinion formers and decision makers. So that could be through the launch of a report or it could through a particular event or seminar or it could be through, even a stunt in campaigning terms.

And that's the proactive side, which is much easier, obviously, by definition to manage.

What's harder, and I think in any good media strategy that's obviously complementary to other strategies, it's also important to protect and preserve some capacity for the reactive. And obviously, this is a particular trend in recent years because the 24-hour news coverage and if also in terms of media, when we also look at new technology and the rise of internet and blogs as well, which is reactive.

You know, you're approached by either a journalist or a correspondent to make a particular comment about a particular story that may or may not be relevant to the campaign.

And given the rise of 24-hour news coverage, that can be quite a drain on an organisation's resources, particularly, if it was a small organisation.

And the challenge, I think, sometimes is to be confident enough to say, 'No, we're not going to comment on that', and focus on delivering an effective campaign strategy.

Terry

Are there ways in which organisations can prepare themselves to respond better to those sorts of approaches?

Chris

Through a good campaign planning process. It is really important, I think, to identify the scope of the campaign. I would always suggest to organisations and to press officers, in this case, that they talk to colleagues and thought about what were the objectives of the campaign. Because it's very easy to be sidetracked into a particular discussion and debate that a journalist may want to have.

Terry

How can organisations evaluate the effectiveness of their campaigning?

Chris

What's really important is to put evaluation at the beginning of a campaign. Too often, we're approached by organisations and say, 'Can you help us evaluate this campaign?'

We go in, look at their campaign plans and of course, they haven't set very clear aims and objectives at the beginning, so it's really difficult, if not impossible sometimes to evaluate that.

Terry

You've mentioned the importance of having clear objectives for a successful campaign. Can you give us an example of how to articulate an objective really well?

Chris

There's been a lot of thought, I think, put into this. And the tried and trusted method, traditionally, has been trying to phrase objectives as being SMART which, though I've seen different definitions, but I take to mean specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timetabled.

I think the -- some of the more recent thinking though is that that can be a little bit inhibiting for organisations and there isn't that much evidence, in fact, of good smart campaign objectives being written. What I think is perhaps more useful increasingly is that we try and communicate, perhaps, measurable is useful and achievable, particularly useful, so those two aspects of those five may be more useful.

Terry

Where do you see the future in campaigning, particularly in reaching new groups of supporters and donors?

Chris

Campaigning is at a very interesting place, historically, I think.

Most organisations established their campaigning functions, particularly the medium and large organisations, relatively recently. Campaigning's a new discipline.

Oxfam for example, in 1986, established its campaigning unit. So it's only the last 20 years or so that campaigning as an organised voluntary and community sector discipline has started to become established, and started to think about where it's going.

So, campaigning is at a very interesting time. I think there are a number of different trends that are quite useful and interesting for the sector to think about and take on. One of which is the role of new media and new technology.

Terry

Do you think those sorts of technologies have a better chance of mobilising new groups of supporters? I'm thinking of, particularly, of younger supporters who then might become lifelong supporters of a particular organisation or charity.

Chris

I suppose my concern would be about that, in my experience, would be that organisations have as one of their objectives, engagement of young people, which I think is a thing organisations need to think about: the resources that that might need and might involve to do that in a sustained way.

I think it's one thing, perhaps, seeking their fiscal support over time, recruiting, retainment, for that. I think it's another thing to mobilise them in relation to campaigning support.

Terry

You've mentioned what you see as the trends in the United Kingdom context, I'm wondering if you've got any thoughts about how that might play out in a European or more international environment?

Chris

One of the most interesting things about the way in which international global Civil society is mobilising is you increasingly detect that it's happening at a regional level. So, there are a number of different regional institutional policy making bodies.

Obviously, the EU, the African Union or even within Africa, the Sadac, the Southern Africa Development Committee, in Southeast Asia, ASEAN. And I think there's a number of different legitimate international instrumental bodies that are coming together to make regional policy, and as a response to that, what you do see and we see this quite a lot in NCVO's international work, is a range of international Civil Society organisations responding and cooperating across borders.

So as, policy making has gone increasingly regional so Civil Society has responded in a way that I think means that they're much more interested in engaging across border, bi-laterally, across different states, and trying to influence policy making process at a regional level.

Terry

Thank you very much indeed, Chris Stalker.

Chris

Thank you.