

Campaigning in collaboration

Executive summary

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Introduction

Campaigning is about making an impact. For many campaigns the most effective way to achieve this impact is by campaigning in collaboration.

Through sharing practical lessons drawn from the real experiences of voluntary organisations campaigning together, *Campaigning in Collaboration* aims to promote effective ways of working collaboratively to achieve lasting change.

A range of case studies are used throughout *Campaigning in Collaboration* to identify key lessons, showing how collaboration can bring different areas of expertise, knowledge and experience to a campaign. The principles developed can be applied to organisations and collaborations of all sizes. Whilst all the collaborations involve organisations within the voluntary and community sector, some of the examples also include organisations from wider civil society such as trade unions. *Campaigning in Collaboration* uses key learning points to suggest ways of avoiding pitfalls and maximising a campaign's potential for impact.

The publication explores essential issues, including agreeing shared objectives and planning, delivering the campaign and managing key campaign messages. It discusses approaches to measuring success, evaluating the effectiveness of both the campaign and the partnership itself, and leaving a campaign legacy.

Focus of this summary

This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings from researching *Campaigning in Collaboration*. It explores the common themes emerging from a series of interviews carried out with case study participants, which revealed some patterns of the benefits, challenges and methods of campaigning with others.

The case studies are briefly introduced in this summary, but are explored in detail throughout *Campaigning in Collaboration*. The headings in this summary follow the chapters of the publication.

Campaigning in Collaboration is available for £15 from www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/publications. Details about the full publication are presented at the end of this summary.

This summary should not be used as an alternative to legal advice.

Key findings

The benefits of campaigning in collaboration

“The organisations were united by an explicit common purpose, an understanding of what each could offer to the campaign, and a realisation that none of them could achieve success alone”.

Jonathan Ellis, Asylum Voucher Campaign

Working in collaboration can increase the impact of campaigns. Establishing a unified voice can offer unique opportunities to influence key decision makers and achieve change. Sharing resources can also enable campaigns to access a broad base of supporters and ensure a co-ordinated approach to targeting ministers and demonstrating the extent of support for a cause.

The combined voice can be very powerful when consensus is reached on a subject. Many successful campaigns have developed strong positions through reaching agreement with a wide range of supporting organisations. Working in partnership can often be a means of gaining widespread public support, as some people are willing to sign up to a movement, without signing up to a specific organisation.

The idea of large numbers of organisations working together can also be attractive to the public, and opinion formers and decision makers often want to know that a campaign is representative of broad opinion.

Some of the benefits identified were:

- Stronger, more united voice
- Increased profile, credibility and influence with decision makers
- Access to a wider supporter and campaigner base
- Shared skills and experience, and improved learning opportunities
- Shared workloads and pooled resources
- Improved prospects for raising public awareness
- Ability to apply pressure at various levels
- Larger organisations can benefit from links or specialities of smaller organisations
- Smaller organisations can benefit from profile, capacity or reach of larger organisations

C A S E S T U D Y

Family Policy Alliance

Through a series of jointly written policy briefings on parenting matters for MPs, senior officials and broadsheet journalists, the Family Policy Alliance (FPA) secured amendments to the Children Bill; achieving recognition that parents were essential to achieving good outcomes for children.

The FPA represents the voice of three organisations – Family Rights Group, Family Welfare Association and Parentline Plus – who collectively have extensive experience of providing a range of support services to families. Using each organisation’s particular expertise in supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged families, the Alliance aimed to fill a gap of service user organisations lobbying within the family support field, through combining to achieve a united and stronger voice to influence policy makers and politicians. The Alliance sought to influence the progress of the Children Bill and the development of the Every Child Matters programme of reforms.

In the course of campaigning, decisions sometimes need to be made about negotiating aims and relinquishing some demands. If a particular demand is proving unachievable, then careful thought should be given about whether to persist with it, particularly if it begins to threaten other issues. The Family Policy Alliance had to make decisions about what was achievable and what they were and were not prepared to surrender: their “minimum requirements”.

Service user organisations can bring significant experience and knowledge to campaigns, providing a convincing and authoritative voice and offering a strong evidence-based approach to political lobbying and policy briefings. Although facts and figures will sometimes be most appropriate, real life case studies can be vital in demonstrating that campaigns are in touch with their beneficiaries, and in achieving media impact.

Additionally, unexpected and surprising partnerships can increase the range and influence of a campaign’s message. Ministers are often interested in who is supporting a campaign. An eye-catching collaboration can prove effective in provoking greater interest from those the campaign is trying to influence, showing that diverse organisations are united on an issue.

The extent to which a collaboration is fruitful or not depends greatly on the personalities and relationships involved. Trust and honesty between organisations are important when campaigning with others and many successful collaborations build on a previous history of understanding and shared aims.

Challenges to campaigning in collaboration

“We had much more of an impact working with the Smokefree Action Coalition than we would have had on our own, but you have to persuade all members that you have a common interest”.

Ian Willmore, Smokefree Action Coalition

Careful consideration should be given to what all partners are hoping to achieve by working together, and how any potential pitfalls are to be avoided. In some collaborative campaigns, there may be ‘baggage’ – history, culture or political affiliation – which could prove problematic at the

start of the campaign. Open, honest communication with partners is vital to the success of the campaign, particularly at the early stages when trust is developing.

Differences in organisational size or profile may also lead to suspicion, for example larger organisations may appear predatory. Organisations need to be clear about what partners are bringing and what they want from each other.

There is also the possibility that a broad range of organisations brings increased demands on decision makers, and satisfying all campaign partners may not be possible.

Some of the challenges identified were:

- Reaching agreements can take time and delay action
- Mistrust as to the intentions of partners
- Partners are overly protective of their own field or contacts
- Disproportionate contribution of resources
- Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities
- Compromised messages
- Uneven profile or publicity
- Reputational risk through association
- Transaction costs

Many of these problems can be minimised if all partners are committed to the shared aims of the campaign, and by having a written agreement (see www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/jointworkingagreements). Some collaborative campaigns have benefited when each organisation has clearly identified territory in which to operate, where their skills can best be used.

Organisations can campaign together in a range of different ways, from loose arrangements to formal structures, identified in the Good Campaigns Guide (NCVO, 2005) as networks, coalitions and alliances. Often collaborations involve combinations of these structures, e.g. a loose network of supporters might exist around a core group of organisations co-ordinating campaign activities. Individuals, trade unions, professional bodies or organisations from public and private sectors may also be involved. Some large campaigns have generated sufficient interest for local groups to be established specifically to support the campaign.

Setting shared objectives and devising strategies

“Decision-makers don’t want individual organisations all talking at the same time, they want to know what the line is on an issue... this is why the Special Educational Consortium does well, because we are the ones to come to on special educational needs.”

Brian Lamb, Special Educational Consortium

Setting shared aims and objectives for collaborative campaigns involves decisions about both the objectives themselves and how they are agreed. Potential partners may have similar aims, but agreeing objectives may require careful negotiation.

C A S E S T U D Y

Asylum Voucher Campaign

The 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act in the UK brought with it a voucher scheme system for new asylum seekers, to be introduced in April 2000. Already facing hardship because they were receiving only 70% of the standard income support, the new scheme introduced vouchers that were only redeemable at certain stores, expired after four weeks, and for which no change was given.

Within 18 months of this, the Government announced that the scheme was to be scrapped.

This achievement was the result of a successful campaign involving political lobbying, raising public awareness and media work. This was led by a collaboration between three organisations campaigning together for a common cause. It was an effective collaboration between Oxfam GB, the Refugee Council, and the Transport and General Workers Union.

The three organisations leading the Asylum Vouchers campaign had slightly different objectives which meant they had to negotiate at the very beginning of the campaign planning stages.

Initially, Oxfam GB aimed to abolish one aspect of the asylum vouchers which prevented people using the vouchers from redeeming any change if they did not spend the full amount of the voucher. However, because they were collaborating with two other organisations who aimed to abolish the scheme completely, negotiations resulted in Oxfam GB agreeing to this objective.

Campaign aims and objectives should be clear, specific and realistic, and understood and agreed by all partners. Different networks, coalitions and alliances take different approaches to agreeing objectives. As campaigning with others may require compromise, organisations need to be clear about their boundaries, beyond which they are not prepared to go.

It is important that campaign objectives are grounded in an identified need or problem. Consideration should be given to how external factors may impact on a campaign, for example, political, social and economic influences in the environment in which the campaign is functioning. Analysis of the available evidence is vital: the organisation's own, as well as those of partner organisations and others.

C A S E S T U D Y

Access to Communication in English Coalition

UK Council on Deafness (UKCoD) is the national infrastructure organisation for charities working with deaf people, representing the views of the sector to government and policy makers. Enabling member organisations to work collaboratively is the core aim of the Council. It has nearly 100 members, covering the full spectrum of deafness and ranging in size from local volunteer groups to major national organisations.

Having achieved official Government recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) as a language in its own right in March 2003, UKCoD began co-ordinating the Access to Communication in English (ACE) campaign. The focus of the ACE campaign was to promote language and communication access services for deaf people whose preferred language is English. The collaborative campaign has produced guidance for service providers and employers about their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and their obligation to provide equality of access, and has presented a report to Government making recommendations that will lead to better provision of services.

UKCoD conducted a survey of their members which revealed high levels of support for a campaign around access to communication in English. They were then able to rally support from member organisations who formed a core group willing to commit capacity and resources to the campaign.

There are often multiple targets to influence, including individuals, groups or institutions. It is likely that these different groups will require different tactics, and working collaboratively can provide opportunities to access different audiences and use different approaches.

Once aims and objectives have been set it is important to agree what success will look like, at an early stage in the campaign planning process.

Structures and decision making

“The campaign was energised by organisations within the coalition and different phases of the campaign required different ways of working together, made possible through the enabling framework of the coalition.”

Richard Bennett, Former Chair, Make Poverty History

There is no one optimum approach to structuring a collaboration in order to execute an effective campaign. Context is crucial: what works for one campaign and collaboration may not work for another. Depending on the nature and aims of the campaign, collaborations can take different forms, and may agree to change structure as the campaign progresses.

C A S E S T U D Y

Special Educational Consortium (SEC)

With an active membership from individuals to large national organisations, SEC has established itself as an authoritative voice for policy makers within Government, on special educational needs (SEN) for children and young people.

Acting as a sounding board for the SEN policy team, meeting week on week throughout the SEN & Disability Rights Bill, for example, SEC has devised some innovative approaches to lobbying Government, enabling policy makers to hear directly from people with experience of the special education system.

SEC takes what it calls a 'consensus approach' to decision making about objectives. This means that they campaign on issues where there is a high degree of consensus among SEC members. Whilst this is a democratic process it can also cause polarisation within the group, sometimes resulting in organisations with a strong opposing view working independently of SEC. This polarity of views is a result of the diverse membership of the coalition which involves cross sector organisations, along with individuals. SEC represents the diverse views expressed by the coalition members to Government, which increases the levels of trust that SEC enjoys with Government.

Many coalitions and alliances draw up a written agreement setting out the key principles of the collaboration and the campaign. A joint working agreement can ensure members are agreed not only on the objectives and ways of working together, but on the decision making structures and how much capacity and resources should be committed to the campaign and the collaboration. A written agreement can be a vital point of reference throughout the campaign.

C A S E S T U D Y

Every Disabled Child Matters

The aim of the Every Disabled Child Matters (EDCM) campaign is to get rights and justice for every disabled child, challenging politicians and policy-makers to make good on the Government's commitment that every child matters. The campaign is calling on all parents and professionals who work or live in the UK to support the campaign to win equal rights and justice for all disabled children and their families in Britain. A key tool in the campaign is the website, which allows individuals to register their support for the rights and justice for every disabled child.

The campaign board is comprised of two national charities (Contact a Family and Mencap), and two umbrella membership organisations (the Council for Disabled Children and the Special Educational Consortium), all working with disabled children and their families. The presence on the campaign board of representatives from two umbrella bodies enables the campaign to speak with the voice of the entire disabled children's sector.

Through the structure of EDCM, which by extension involves all members of the two membership organisations, the campaign sought to represent the whole of the disabled children's sector. Additionally, because the Council for Disabled Children is a semi-independent council within the National Children's Bureau, the campaign links to the wider children's sector. EDCM ensured a broad spectrum of influencing: it opened up public campaigning on disabled children for the first time, and enabled constituent lobbying of MPs at a local level.

For larger collaborations, members should consider the potential trade-off between planning and decision making first, and then bringing others on board at a later stage, versus being completely inclusive in all of the planning phases.

Scenario planning – deciding 'what happens if...' – is a useful way for campaigns to prepare for different situations and finding ways of responding.

Managing collaborative campaigns

"Working collectively is not always easy; there will be tensions along the way, but you can build in ways to address them as they arise."

Glen Tarman, Trade Justice Movement

Collaborative campaigns will inevitably present unexpected challenges to the organisations involved. A clearly defined structure can help mitigate problems and ensure that the boundaries of the collaboration are maintained: establishing what each organisation involved in the campaign will and will not do.

It is important to emphasise that collaborative working is an evolutionary process, e.g. some collaborations that begin as informal networks build into strong coalitions. Many campaigns need to have flexible structures, and many effective collaborations agree to evolve with time, in order to be responsive to external factors. Many campaign successes have been achieved with recognition of the need to be opportunistic.

C A S E S T U D Y**Education for All**

The aim of Education for All is to ensure that all young lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people can fulfil their potential, and that the UK's schools and education systems can deal appropriately with homophobia and homophobic bullying. Working with a broad-based coalition of organisations, including government departments, local authorities, unions, voluntary and community organisations, children and LGB groups, the campaign intends to develop and implement a Great Britain-wide action plan to address this problem.

Education for All is a joint campaign developed by Stonewall, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Youth Scotland.

Some collaborative campaigns, such as Education for All, regard it as important to have a strong, experienced lead, with all partners trusting that decisions taken would be in the best interests of the campaign.

Campaign issues will often have been framed by others – particularly by opponents – and will bring with them a history of discussion, argument and strong opinion. Clarifying or reframing these arguments is a vital step in campaign strategy. It is also vital that campaign messages are communicated both internally and externally.

C A S E S T U D Y**Smokefree Action Coalition**

The Health Act 2006, which bans smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces in England, was achieved in a short time by the Smokefree Action campaign, despite initial Government resistance to legislation for this end. Success was delivered by a coalition that centred on, but was much broader than, organisations involved in public health; also including trade unions, individual politicians, and local councils wanting to go smokefree.

The Coalition was led by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH); a public health charity campaigning to reduce the harm caused by tobacco. The Coalition campaigned for smokefree legislation, which achieved significant social change and shifted public opinion on workplace smoking from indifference to overwhelming support. The level of public support achieved will be vital to ensure the successful implementation of the legislation in July 2007.

There were two key opponents of smokefree legislation: the tobacco lobby and the hospitality trade. The Smokefree Action Coalition's strategic aim was to separate the position of these two, as their preferences were subtly different. If faced with some form of smokefree legislation, the tobacco lobby would favour local regulations. The preference of the hospitality trade, however, was for national legislation. When it was first proposed to give local councils powers to go smokefree, this was particularly unwelcome to people in the hospitality trade, as it would result in differences across counties. The positions of the two main opponents were therefore split.

The progress of a campaign may often be dictated by external factors such as government agenda, and campaigns need to be responsive to developments. As such, capacity should be reserved for responsive campaigning activities.

Organisations are naturally protective of their identity and supporters, some having spent years establishing and maintaining their brands, and members of collaborative campaigns often need to make careful decisions about when to use their profile.

Monitoring and evaluation

Accountable campaigning and learning from past experience is essential in order to maximise potential for impact and change, and to evaluate the effectiveness of a partnership. Monitoring and evaluation enables organisations to establish what they are hoping to achieve, what success will look like, and to track how the collaborative campaign is progressing.

Through monitoring and evaluating, campaigns can produce an evidence-based assessment of both the process and the impact, and enable organisations to be accountable to stakeholders. Decisions should be made about what will be recorded and which partners will be responsible for this.

Some organisations commission an independent external evaluation of their campaign, as part of a comprehensive means of verification, which has many valuable benefits. However, the drawback is the cost.

C A S E S T U D Y

Corporate Responsibility (CORE) Coalition

Aiming to develop and implement a sustainable model of corporate responsibility, CORE has achieved some successes in the Companies Bill. They effectively lobbied for a director's duty of care to be included in the Bill, and ensured that the top 1,300 public companies have to report to their shareholders on the social and environmental impact of their activities abroad.

Developed out of a loose and informal campaigning network, CORE became a formal coalition in 2000 and is now guided by seven organisations, with around 130 members. CORE has also teamed up with the Trade Justice Movement, a partnership which is set to continue as CORE persists with its campaign around corporate accountability and liability.

CORE received some funding from a Trust. Therefore, they have to be accountable to the Trust along with a range of other stakeholders. Initially they reported to their funders on their campaigning activities and are also planning to conduct an evaluation of the campaign themselves. As part of the initial assessment, CORE conducted a SWOT analysis (an examination of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the campaign and the approach CORE took. Whilst this was based on CORE's internal perspective of their campaign and therefore not independent, it was a useful tool for looking at what worked well in the campaign, what did not work so well and how it could be improved. This then enabled them to consider in more depth what the most successful aspects of the campaign were, and why; along with which aspects were not so successful and exploring the reasons for this.

A useful way of evaluating a campaign is to gather information from a range of key stakeholders at periods throughout the campaign, and particularly at the end. This can include staff and volunteers within the organisations, along with external people such as civil servants, journalists and parliamentarians. The nature of this type of information means that it would be best collected by independent external evaluators, thus allowing stakeholders to speak freely and honestly.

Leaving a legacy

Some partnerships plan to come to an end when the campaign objective is achieved, and some organisations may only commit to a coalition because it is time-limited. However, if legislative change is secured, a coalition might remain in place to ensure that policy is effectively implemented in practice, and the partnership may continue, often in a modified form.

A well structured collaborative campaign should plan for bringing the work to an end. The nature of campaigning means that flexibility and responsiveness are vital traits within coalitions, therefore initial plans should include agreement on when and how decisions about ending a collaborative campaign will be made, and the exit strategy. Even if the intention is that the partnership will continue, an exit strategy provides for the unexpected.

C A S E S T U D Y

Make Poverty History

Achieving both political and social change, the Make Poverty History campaign made strides towards achieving the objectives of more and better aid, debt cancellation and trade justice. It also had a profound impact upon campaigning with unprecedented levels of public participation and recognition.

At the height of the campaign in 2005, the coalition's membership swelled to 540 organisations and mobilised millions of individual campaign supporters. Strategic planning, effective co-ordination and a dedicated team enhanced the impact the campaign made, but key to its success was the coming together of organisations of all sizes across the sector, to campaign in collaboration in order to best achieve shared goals.

The scale of Make Poverty History and the mobilisation created meant that many member organisations did not want to lose the benefits of campaigns on trade, aid and debt all working together. The coalition generated sufficient interest for hundreds of organisations to join and begin campaigning for the first time. These organisations needed to feel that they were a part of the future of the coalition, and many were concerned about legacy arrangements and discussion to end Make Poverty History. The means of agreeing the legacy arrangements was a complicated process for the Make Poverty History coalition, but a key lesson is that different partners will have different views on ending or continuing the campaign.

Often, the success of a campaign, the lessons learned, and the legacy left, will mean that an organisation or coalition's voice will be stronger when campaigning on the next issue. Planning exit strategies should involve thinking in terms of the legacy the collaborative campaign will leave.

Conclusion

Through conducting this research it was possible to draw some specific, micro-level conclusions and recommendations which should support organisations when campaigning in collaboration, but it also uncovered some more general, macro-level trends in effective campaigning.

Although there are many challenges to campaigning in collaboration, these can usually be resolved and are often outweighed by the potential advantages of campaigning in a network, coalition or alliance. Working collaboratively can be an effective mechanism for increasing the impact of a campaign.

Campaigning requires resources, so achieving a strong voice is sometimes only possible through a coalition. It can also be encouraging for the public and decision makers alike to see organisations coming together to campaign for a common cause. Many of the campaigns featured in *Campaigning in Collaboration* include partnerships with wider civil society organisations outside the voluntary and community sector. It seems that a trend is emerging for diverse organisations to come together nationally and locally, and with a rise in single issue campaigns, collaborations of this nature appear likely to increase.

Service providers have an important role to play in shaping policy, bringing clear evidence and direct experience of how policy affects people in practice. Collaboration can enable small or non-campaigning voluntary or community organisations to add their voice, knowledge and experience to political campaigning.

Clearly defined structures can enable organisations to contribute according to their means and expertise, reduce duplication and maximise resources. However, once a structure is in place it is vital that it is reviewed and adapts to change. This flexibility extends to an understanding of and respect for any differences between organisations involved in a campaign, and will be vital when external factors influence the course of the campaign.

Large, high-profile campaigns can generate sufficient interest for mass citizen action in support of the cause. This has demonstrated that individuals may often support a cause rather than signing up to one organisation. The involvement of wider civil society in campaigning for social and political change during 2005 has pushed campaigning higher up in the public's consciousness.

Campaigning in Collaboration

A joint publication between NCVO's Collaborative Working Unit and Campaigning Effectiveness



Campaigning in Collaboration shares practical lessons drawn from the real experiences of a range of voluntary organisations campaigning together to change the world around them. It includes key lessons about agreeing shared objectives, structures and decision making, and leaving a campaign legacy.

This publication is aimed at individuals and organisations thinking about campaigning in collaboration or aiming to increase the impact of their campaigns. It is also useful for those who wish to learn more about how other organisations design, plan, deliver and evaluate collaborative campaigns in practice.

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