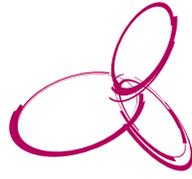


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ENGAGING PEOPLE IN ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY

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UNIVERSITY OF
TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY



The
**Cancer
Council**
New South Wales

STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE PEOPLE IN ACTIVISM AND ADVOCACY

Research report

Final report

For The Cancer Council (NSW)

Author:

Emma Partridge

Institute for Sustainable Futures

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Executive Summary

Background

This is a report of a research project exploring the issues of activism and advocacy. It was commissioned by the Cancer Council NSW (TCCN) and undertaken by Emma Partridge of the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Scope

The project consisted of a review of relevant literature and a series of research interviews with representatives of other non-profit activist or advocacy organisations. The scope of the research covered the wide range of attempts by various organisations to involve members of the public in activism and advocacy of any kind. It included e-activism as well as face-to-face activism.

Purpose

The purpose of the project was to inform TCCN's own strategies to engage members of the public in activism and advocacy roles associated with cancer control. As such it had a particular focus on two main areas of interest to TCCN, namely:

- (i) Factors that lead to effective engagement and activism; and
- (ii) Benchmarking, performance measures or indicators used by other organisations / movements to measure and evaluate the success of their activism and advocacy strategies.

Research questions

This was a challenging project. The central question in which TCCN is interested – why some people in some situations take action for the social good, or choose to advocate on behalf of others, is perhaps *the* key dilemma for social movement theorists. Further, in a practical sense, persuading or motivating people to act is the key challenge faced by campaigners, activists, advocacy organisations, charities and 'good cause' groups of many kinds.

The specific research questions that the review has attempted to answer include:

- > What motivates people to become involved in activism or advocacy activities?
- > Are there any identified characteristics or segments of people more likely to be involved in activism?
- > What strategies are useful for sustaining people's involvement in movements and networks?
- > What constitutes an effective communication strategy? How should an organisation communicate in order to maximise interest and involvement without over-loading people?
- > What are the factors that cause people to move from receiving information to taking action?
- > What strategies are effective in encouraging people to move to more active forms of involvement (e.g from e-activism to face-to-face activism)?

- > What are the common barriers and challenges faced by movements and organisations seeking to increase levels of activism?
- > What measures are used by other organisations/movements to evaluate what they do, and how appropriate are these measures?
- > Are there any benchmarks for response rates to calls to action in e-activism? Is there some kind of 'critical mass' required for effective e-campaigns?

Literature review

Part 2 of the report discusses the findings from the review of literature. The review draws on some of the extensive theoretical literature that focuses on social movements, as well as on existing models of behaviour change more generally. It then considers some of the factors that appear to help motivate people to take their 'first step' towards activism or advocacy, and to remain engaged over time. While motivations are many and varied, one of the key findings is that simply being asked is important. Some of the barriers to activism are explored, with the main one being lack of time, or perceived lack of time. Some strategies that emerged as potentially useful for supporting activists, and sustaining commitment and involvement were as follows:

- Helping people get some perspective on their movement or campaign
- Celebrating achievements
- Promoting, ensuring and building on the benefits of involvement
- Establishing peer support groups
- Addressing any negative experiences for those currently involved

Strategies for increasing people's 'level' of participation, or activism are explored, as is the role of e-activism and other uses of information communication technology to potentially widen and deepen participation.

The review also considers the question of what constitutes effective communication, and discusses the social marketing approach, and a range of other tools and guides for effective communication for social change. Finally, the review asks how activism and advocacy should be evaluated, and discusses the various kinds of criteria that are being and can be used to measure or judge success in this field.

Interviews

Part 3 of this report contains the findings from the interviews undertaken as part of this project.

A series of semi-structured interviews were undertaken with six representatives of non-profit activist or advocacy organisations. There was a keen interest among all interviewees in the questions that inform this research project. The question of how organizations can develop more effective strategies for mobilising and engaging people in activism was one that interviewees easily related to. In fact, the research questions were questions to which all of the interviewees had given much thought, and to which their organisations devote significant effort and resources to exploring. These kinds of questions were not seen as peripheral, but rather they go to the very heart of the work that non-profit activism or advocacy organisations do – they structure the way these organisations view their very reason for being.

Given this, the interviews yielded a large volume of extremely rich material that complements the findings from the literature review. This material is discussed in detail in Part 3 and is organised under headings relevant to the research questions.

Conclusion

The implications of the research for the Cancer Council are discussed in Part 4 of this report. Briefly, the conclusions include the following points:

- Change is social: the importance of bringing people together
- A decentralised, 'scaled-down' structure of participation is preferable
- Communication strategies are important, but secondary to social networks
- Online strategies have potential, as part of a broad suite of tools
- Strategies should target those people who are predisposed to change
- Organisations need to clearly identify and promote benefits of participation
- There is a need to respond to identified barriers
- Providing opportunities for 'learning by doing' is an effective way to build confidence
- Evaluation is part of the change process

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• PART 1: BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Background and purpose

The Cancer Council NSW (TCCN) is keenly interested in issues of activism and advocacy. TCCN's interest in this issue is broad. It covers e-activism as well as face-to-face activism, and is not limited to strategies in the health arena, but covers the wide range of attempts by various organisations to involve members of the public in activism and advocacy of any kind.

To explore these issues, TCCN engaged the Institute for Sustainable Futures to conduct a review of relevant literature and a series of research interviews with representatives of other non-profit activist or advocacy organisations.

The purpose of the project as a whole was to inform TCCN's own strategies to engage members of the public in activism and advocacy roles associated with cancer control.

Research questions

This research project has attempted to address the two main areas of interest highlighted by TCCN in its original brief for this project, namely:

- (iii) Factors that lead to effective engagement and activism; and
- (iv) Benchmarking, performance measures or indicators used by other organisations/movements to measure and evaluate the success of their activism and advocacy strategies.

The research questions that the review has attempted to answer include:

- > What motivates people to become involved in activism or advocacy activities?
- > Are there any identified characteristics or segments of people more likely to be involved in activism?
- > What strategies are useful for sustaining people's involvement in movements and networks?
- > What constitutes an effective communication strategy? How should an organisation communicate in order to maximise interest and involvement without over-loading people?
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- > What measures are used by other organisations/movements to evaluate what they do, and how appropriate are these measures?
- > Are there any benchmarks for response rates to calls to action in e-activism? Is there some kind of 'critical mass' required for effective e-campaigns?

Introduction

This is a challenging project. The central question in which TCCN is interested – why some people in some situations take action for the social good, or choose to advocate on behalf of others, is perhaps *the* key dilemma for social movement theorists. Further, in a practical sense, persuading or motivating people to act is the key challenge faced by campaigners, activists, advocacy organisations, charities and ‘good cause’ groups of many kinds.

It is clear that there are always far more people who are sympathetic to, or supportive of, a given cause, issue or campaign than there are people who are willing to take action – whether of a personal, public or political kind. This has been called the ‘free rider problem’ – after the economic concept of a person who consumes more than their fair share of a good, without making a fair contribution. The free rider refuses to shoulder their share of the costs – while counting on others to do so and thus gaining free access to the good. In an activist context, the term is also useful – many people support and benefit from the kinds of positive social change that result from the efforts of social movement activists and advocacy organisations and groups, yet only a few are willing to make a personal contribution to these efforts (see Maddison 2003 for further discussion of this problem).

The question of both why this phenomena exists, and how to change it – how to transform the ‘armchair supporters’ into activists or advocates – is one that many writers and activists have grappled with.

Clearly, it has not been possible to do proper justice to these complex questions in the current project. Time and budget constraints have limited the amount of work that has been undertaken in relation to these questions. However, what this review does attempt to do is to clearly articulate the issues, and provide an overview of previous and current attempts to address them, both from the literature and from the reflections of the people interviewed. This overview includes some consideration of challenging theoretical questions of a psychological and sociological nature (such as, for example, What motivates people? Why do people become involved? Do active people share certain characteristics? Are there criteria that can inform a segmentation of the community according to their level of activism?). The review has also attempted to ascertain the kinds of criteria, or measures that are (or can be) used by various organisations or groups to determine whether a campaign is considered successful or effective, and to benchmark their work against similar organisations.

In addition to a theoretical focus, this report also considers practical approaches. It draws on published and web-based material designed to assist groups and organizations to engage people in activism and advocacy, to sustain the involvement of those who are engaged, and to increase the ‘level’ of people’s activism. It also draws on the practice-based reflections of a number of highly experienced people who are currently working in non-profit activism or advocacy organisations. The author conducted a series of semi-structured phone and face-to-face interviews with such representatives of other organisations during August and September 2007. Details of the people interviewed, and their organisations can be found at Appendix E. The questionnaire used to guide the semi-structured interviews is at Appendix C and the text of the email used to recruit interviewees is at Appendix D.

• PART 2: FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

This section outlines the findings of the literature review in relation to the research questions described above. Findings from the research interviews conducted for this project are discussed separately, in Part 3.

The constraints of this project have obviously meant that the literature review has been neither systematic nor exhaustive. Far more material is available than it has been possible to review, and many 'promising leads' have simply had to be ignored in order to complete the review within the timeframe. Its findings, which have been presented below using the project's research questions as headings, should therefore be considered indicative rather than conclusive.

What motivates people to become involved in activism or advocacy activities?

In attempting to answer this question, there are a number of sources that might be useful. Firstly, we can look to the academic, theoretical literature that focuses specifically on activism (known as 'social movement' literature). This assumes that the focus of the question is the second part – the particular nature of activist or social movement 'actions', and what might motivate people to become involved in these. Alternatively, we can focus on the first part of the question, that is, on motivation per se. In asking what *generally* motivates people to act, reference to the field of literature known as 'behaviour change' may be useful. Perhaps bringing these strands together, and drawing on understandings from both will help inform the development of practical strategies to motivate people to become involved in activism or advocacy activities. These two approaches are explored below.

• **Theoretical approaches to social movements and activism**

There is an extensive theoretical literature that focuses on social movements, located largely in the fields of sociology and political science. While the scope of this review is not focussing on this academic literature to any real degree – given TCCN's greater interest in examples of practice-based approaches, it is useful to acknowledge and describe this theoretical field briefly.

The main theoretical approaches to the explanation of social movements are 'resource mobilization theory' and 'new social movements theory'. The former is the dominant approach in the North America, while the latter is a newer approach, dominant in Europe and becoming more popular in the US. Jones (2002) provides a useful introduction to these two traditions, and the basic differences between them. A more extensive discussion of these theoretical approaches is provided by Maddison (2003).

To summarise these approaches very briefly, resource mobilization theory is concerned with the way social movements operate within a political context. This includes questions about how they mobilize resources and exploit political opportunities, and a consideration of measures of their political and policy impact and the factors that influence their success or failure, particularly as defined by the nature of their relationships with the state. This approach explains individual and collective action as determined by a 'rational' evaluation of the relative costs and rewards of that action (Maddison 2003:8-9).

New social movements theory is more concerned with internal movement processes, movement members and the sociological and psychological factors that lead people to form a collective identity and join a movement. It also considers the broad

structural conditions that lead to the emergence of movements, the subjective experiences of movement membership, and the symbolic and cultural aspects of movement activity (Jones 2002: 14-15, Maddison 2003: 12-19).

This review is specifically interested in the question of what motivates people to become involved in activism, or advocacy. On this question, the utilitarian, 'rational choice' explanations of resource mobilisation theory appear less useful. Indeed this approach has been widely criticised as inadequate for explaining the complex motivations and experiences of social movement actors and the meanings that they give to their activist experiences (Maddison 2003). This is particularly the case when attempting to explain why people take action on behalf of a cause which, from a 'rational choice' perspective appears not to be in their direct self-interest. Insights from new social movements theory on the other hand are far more useful, as they allow a specific focus on questions of identity (and collective identity) formation and maintenance.

There are also approaches that draw on psychology to help explain why people become involved in collective action. The interdisciplinary field of political psychology for example, may be a useful source of literature. Duncan (1999) provides an overview of some of the psychological approaches, and proposes a model that integrates theories of group consciousness and personality and life experiences in order to explain collective action. She argues that psychologists studying activism have theorised how individual differences in personality characteristics and life experiences might distinguish activists from non-activists. However, this does not necessarily explain *why* these factors are associated with collective action (Duncan 1999: 612). On the other hand, social psychologists have analysed group identification, or the development of group consciousness. This approach may help provide possible psychological motives for collective action, but obviously one does not necessarily lead to the other. Further, it ignores the individual differences between personalities and life experiences of people who take collective action (Duncan 1999).

Duncan's model is reproduced below, and illustrates the idea that while intrapersonal variables may lead to participation in collective action, another possibility is that group consciousness is a mediating factor, giving psychological meaning to intrapersonal variables, and resulting in collective action. The model also allows for reciprocal influences, or reverse effects, whereby group consciousness can affect personality and life experience, and collective action both contributes to the maintenance and development of group consciousness, and affects personality and life experience.

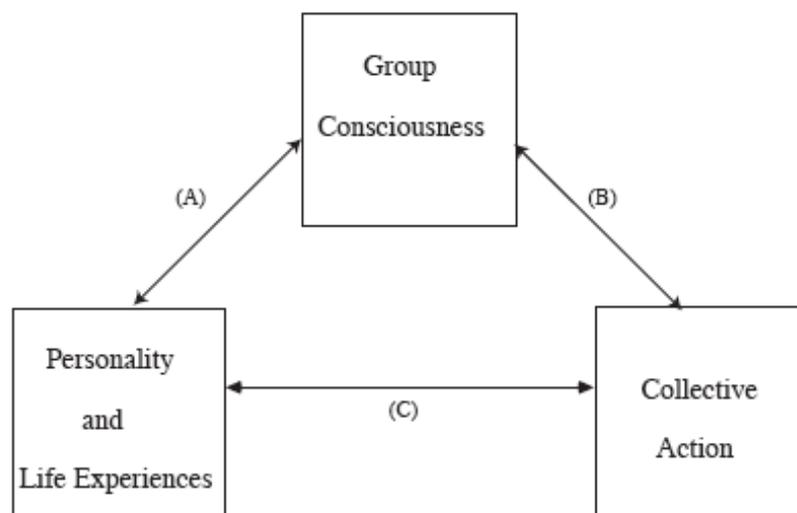


Figure 1: Mediational model of group consciousness and collective action (Duncan 1999).

Research into social activism has suggested many factors to explain activists' motivation, including self-concept, socialisation, the search for meaning and identity, values, personality attributes, political consciousness, a quest to join community life, and a need for status. One consistent finding is that the best predictor of future involvement in activism or volunteering is previous experience of involvement (Borshuk 2004: 301-2).

As noted in the introduction, the central questions of this review – how to engage and motivate people in activism or advocacy, or indeed to persuade or enable them to take action for any 'good cause' are challenging questions. It is not the intention of the project, (nor would it be possible within the scope) to delve more deeply into the many academic psychological, sociological and political theories of social movements. As can be seen from the brief reference to the field made above, the literature is highly theoretical and complex. However, it is probably fair to say that the gap that exists between this theoretical field and the development of strategies 'on the ground' is not ideal. Improving the connection between theory and practice (in both directions) would be likely to benefit both sides of this equation.

For practitioners, further and closer investigation of the theoretical literature could well be valuable, as it has the potential to improve the conceptual framework for strategies to engage people in activism and advocacy. Of course strategy development will also continue to draw heavily on practical experience of 'what works', but the theoretical literature may be a useful reference in better understanding why strategies are *not* working, or not working as well as expected, or how they could be enhanced. In particular, reference to new social movement theory should help to caution against basing strategies on an assumption of 'rational choice' without acknowledging the more subjective constructions of identity and meaning that influence people's involvement in activism and advocacy.

- **Models of behaviour change**

The academic literature on activism and social movements is one source of a useful theoretical context for this review. However, while this field focuses on what motivates people to become involved in activism or social movements specifically, it may be just as useful to take a different tack and ask what motivates people to make *any* kind of change to their 'usual' behaviour, or to take *any* kind of action. In reflecting on this question, the field of behaviour change literature is a useful reference. A brief overview of the most well known theories of 'behaviour change' is therefore provided here.

The development of programs and strategies that aim to change people's behaviour, or motivate them to take some action that they are not currently taking, is based on a number of assumptions (whether explicit or implicit) about how, why and under what circumstances people decide to change their behaviour. These assumptions commonly draw on established theories or models of 'behaviour change', or at least elements or adaptations of these theories. For this reason, revisiting the main assumptions to emerge from the theoretical field of 'behaviour change' may be useful in clarifying what the literature has to say about the 'cause' of behaviour change.

The most well known models of behaviour change have emerged in the field of health psychology. These 'social-cognitive models' focus on how the interaction between social context and cognitive processes determines the likelihood of behaviour change. While they were originally developed specifically to explain

people's health-related behaviour, and have been most extensively used in the field of health promotion, these models, or variations on them, have also been applied more broadly, and have informed and influenced the field of behaviour change generally. For example, they have been used to inform the development of workplace equal opportunity strategies (EOWA), and programs to encourage people to use healthier, less environmentally damaging forms of travel (such as the 'Travelsmart' programs throughout Australia).

The two most commonly used health behaviour change models are the health belief model and the 'stages of change' model. Their key features can be broadly summarised as follows:

The **health belief model** suggests that the likelihood that an individual will engage in a given health behaviour depends on their perceptions of internal and external cues, their susceptibility, severity of consequences, and benefits and costs. Adaptations of this original model have added perceptions of outcome (likelihood of success) and self-efficacy (confidence). The model has been criticised for ignoring social and environmental factors (for example, Curtis 2000:12-13), although other references to it suggest that it can include consideration of how demographic, social, psychological and structural variables impact on people's perceptions, and consequently their health-related behaviour (for example, US Department of Health and Human Services 2004: 222). It has also been criticised for assuming that humans are inherently rational, that they process information in a rational manner and behave accordingly. Curtis 2000:12-13). However, the model has been highly influential and used a basis for the development of more advanced models of behaviour change generally.

The **stages of change model** (also known as the 'transtheoretical model of behaviour change') views behaviour change as a process not an event. It sees individuals as at varying levels of motivation, or readiness, to change. Specifically it suggests that there are six stages of change that people may experience, ranging from not interested in change" to "sustained change". The changes can be described as follows:¹

1. **Precontemplation:** the stage at which people are not intending to change or take action in the near future. People may be at this stage because they are uninformed or under informed about the consequences of their behaviour or the possible benefits of changing their behaviour.
2. **Contemplation:** people are intending to change within the foreseeable future. They are more aware of the benefits of changing, but are also acutely aware of the possible negative consequences of changing. This balance between the costs and benefits of changing can keep people stuck at this stage for long periods of time. These people are not ready for traditional action-oriented approaches to change.
3. **Preparation** (sometimes listed as '**decision/determination**'): people are intending to take action in the immediate future. They are warmed up to change and can clearly see the benefits for themselves and for others. They are very aware of the costs and benefits of change and are likely to have taken some significant action recently (e.g. actively sought information).
4. **Action:** people have made specific overt recent modifications to their behaviour
5. **Maintenance:** people are working to prevent a relapse to the previous behaviour. Compared with other stages, they are also less tempted to relapse and demonstrate more confidence (self-efficacy) that they can continue their changes.

¹ This description is drawn from EOWA (summarising Prochaska & Velicer 1997), US Department of Health and Human Services 2004 and Curtis 2000).

6. **Termination:** by this stage people have zero temptation and 100% self-efficacy to maintain their behaviour.

It is important to recognise that this is not a linear model whereby people move through the stages to the end – they can enter and exit at any point and may slip back from one stage to the previous one rather than progressing in a linear or rational fashion (US Department of Health and Human Services 2004:221, Curtis 2000).

Diffusion of innovations theory addresses how new ideas, products or social practices spread within a society. Rogers (1983) suggests that in relation to the adoption of any innovation, new idea or practice, people are distributed (in a bell curve pattern) across five categories, namely innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards.² The likelihood of their adopting the 'innovation' will depend on their awareness; knowledge and interest; persuasion of its value, decision; trial; and response to the trial (adoption or rejection). In terms of what influences people's adoption decisions, the diffusion of innovation approach emphasises the value of social networks over and above the mass media (US Department of Health and Human Services 2004: 226). As McKenzie-Mohr puts it, the adoption of new behaviours is most often the result of friends, family or colleagues introducing us to them, in a process known as social diffusion.

In general, theories of behaviour change suggest that there are five main influences on behaviour. These can be summarised as follows:³

- 1 **Social and subjective norms:** The perceptions a person has of the expectations of significant others regarding the behaviour and the motivation to comply with these expectations.
- 2 **Attitudes:** The positive or negative evaluations of the possible consequences of performing a behaviour.
- 3 **Self-efficacy** for the behaviour or change of behaviour: The situation-specific confidence a person has that they are able to change their behaviour and maintain this behaviour change. A common argument is that people cannot be expected to engage in a behaviour, or even to form intentions to engage in a behaviour unless they believe that they have the necessary skills and abilities to perform the behaviour.
- 4 **Peer support:** The availability of support from peers and particularly the extent to which peers also demonstrate or model the relevant behaviour.
- 5 **Knowledge** from information/education: The extent to which a person has knowledge of the causes and consequences of their current behaviour and possible alternative behaviours.

One recent model of behaviour change that draws on a number of the basic tenets of the behaviour change literature described above is the '**seven doors model**' of voluntary behaviour change proposed by Robinson (2004, also 2001). This model, which is illustrated below, suggests that there are seven 'doors' that need to be opened in order for a person to enter a 'change space'. The model suggests that it is the interaction of a series of predisposing, enabling, triggering and satisfying factors that creates a 'change space' where voluntary change occurs. The model assumes that 'people tend to adopt voluntary changes because they are unhappy, frustrated or dissatisfied with their lives' – that is when they experience a sense of dissonance

² For an explanation of the characteristics of people in each category see Rogers (1983), or see Robinson (2001) for a more recent adaption and summary of this segmentation.

³ This summary adapted from EOWA (www.eowa.gov.au).

between their dreams and reality.

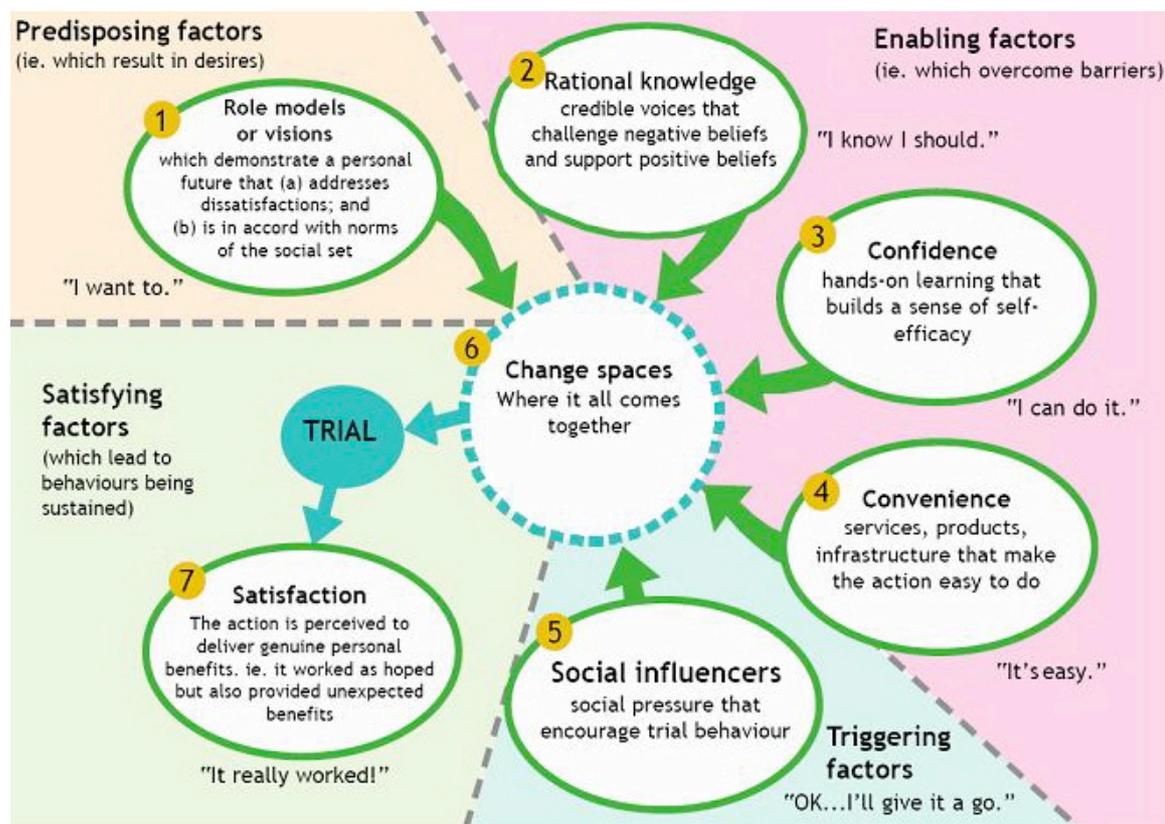


Figure 2: The 'seven doors' model of voluntary behaviour change (Social change media)

While the model is a useful illustration of some of the elements that come together to create change, its very clarity is in many ways deceptive, for it would be a mistake to see social change as a clear, predictable, rational process, or a process that happens at the individual level. Indeed, Robinson stresses that for individuals, change is not a rational process, but rather an imaginative one, influenced by a person's hopes, values, sense of identity and perceptions of social norms. He argues that the assumption that people are 'rational, utility-maximising individuals' is flawed (Robinson 2001:3). This 'rational choice' theory of human behaviour tends to encourage policies and strategies that focus only on the instrumental level, and attempt simply to increase incentives and remove disincentives. This is to ignore the reality of human behaviour and meaning-making – the level of what Robinson calls 'inspiration, imagination, desire, emotion, poetry', and what new social movement theorists might call the subjective construction of meaning.

Further, by its very nature *social* change does not happen at an individual level. It is a collective process. As Robinson puts it:

We need peers to inspire us, lead us, support us, motivate us to be our best, convince us, and give us reasons to stop acting like "utility-maximising individuals" and start acting like members of a community. [...] The work of a change agent therefore involves bringing people together and facilitating the collective work of groups (2001:4).

Some of the useful basic principles of behaviour change to emerge from Robinson's work (2001, 2006) are:

- Social change is about people's hopes and dreams – their values and

aspirations. These are personal and holistic and very different from those of organisations

- Information is powerful, but it is also cold and rational and so does not create change on its own
- Change is inherently social – the ‘triggers’ for change are most commonly interactions with other people

Robinson also suggests that the people who have the capacity to trigger change in others have particular characteristics, namely they:

- believe in an alternative, hopeful future
- are part of the actor’s social circle
- are credible to the actor
- ask or prod the actor to change.

These insights into the collective, peer-driven nature of social change are particularly useful and suggest clear implications for those seeking to develop strategies to encourage or facilitate such change. As Robinson puts it, if we accept that change is primarily created by people meeting, discussing problems and collaborating on solutions, then change agents should see themselves as ‘facilitators of dialogues’ or ‘choreographers of interactive events’, not simply communicators of existing knowledge. In particular, given that change is peer-led, the aim should be ‘to mix people-who-have-done-it with people-who-are-thinking-about-it’ (2006:4).

Some of the implications of this approach will be discussed further in Part 3.

Are there any identified characteristics or segments of people more likely to be involved in activism?

This project is concerned with people’s engagement specifically in activism and advocacy. However, these types of activities are specific forms of what might generally be called civic engagement. Given this, in considering *who* is most likely to be involved in activism, it is useful to consider the social context for, and trends in relation to, civic engagement generally. This can provide useful clues as to the likely characteristics of those people who are more likely to be involved in activism.

Some of the available data on the characteristics of volunteers may be useful in this respect, and this data is discussed below.

• Characteristics of volunteers

A recent ABS survey of over 15,000 Australians (ABS 2006) found that 34% of the Australian population currently volunteer in some way, and that volunteers undertook a total of 730 million hours of voluntary work in 2006. While the proportion of the population who volunteer has increased over the past decade (from 32% in 2000 and 24% in 1995), the average annual number of hours contributed per person has fallen substantially (from 74 hours in 1995, to 72 hours in 2000 to 56 hours in 2006).

There are some clear conclusions that can be drawn about the demographic profile of Australians who are more likely to volunteer. The ABS (2006) data shows that more **women** volunteer than men (36% compared with 32%), more **parents** (particularly those in couple relationships) volunteer than non-parents, and people **born in Australia** are more likely to volunteer than those born overseas (36% compared with 29%). The age group most likely to volunteer is those **aged 35-44 years**, although

volunteers in the oldest age groups (65-84 and 55-64 years) spend more hours on volunteer work. **Employed** people are more likely to volunteer (34% of full-time and 44% of part-time employees) than those who are unemployed (26%) or not in the labour force (30%), however, the average number of hours worked by unemployed and retired volunteers was higher than for other employment categories. There was considerable variation in the number of hours contributed to volunteering, with the average being 2.6 hours a week and the median 1.1 hours per week.⁴

Interestingly in the context of this project, of the fourteen types of volunteer activity analysed in the ABS survey, 'lobbying, advocacy and policy research' is one of the three *least common* types of activity undertaken, with less than 10% of volunteers reporting involvement in these activities. Further, just 3.1% of the Australian population volunteers for an organisation in the 'health' category. The four most common groups that people volunteered for were sport and physical recreation, education and training, community welfare and religious groups. These four types of groups accounted for three quarters of all volunteering involvements, with 'health' accounting for 6.9% (ABS 2006).

Factors that cause people to move from receiving information to taking action

Information does not always trigger action, and concern does not always lead to activism. Time and again, on numerous issues, a large gap between attitude and action, or 'knowing' and 'doing' can be observed. Taking the environment as an example, it is clear that many more people are aware of, or even concerned about, environmental issues than those who actually take some relevant action. In 2004, 57% of Australians stated they were concerned about environmental problems, yet only 7% of had formally registered an environmental concern in the previous 12 months (such as by writing a letter, telephoning, participating in a demonstration, or signing a petition), while 20% had donated time or money to environmental protection (ABS 2004).

Explaining the gap between information and action is not easy, and indeed the 'answer' is likely to be a complex matrix showing the interaction between a variety of factors according to the context, the person, the issue, and the particular action in question.

However, considering some of the factors that appear to help motivate people to take their 'first step' towards activism or advocacy may be useful in terms of developing more effective recruitment strategies and attracting new members. It may also be relevant in considering how to motivate existing members to take part in new kinds of activities for the first time (such as joining a group).

- **Motivations are many and varied, but being asked is important**

There is evidence that simply being asked, or being invited to be involved is an effective trigger for many people. The UK national volunteering survey (Institute for Volunteering Research 1997), found that almost half of all volunteers cited 'someone

⁴ Overseas studies suggest that the demographic profile of Australian volunteers is fairly typical. For example, in the US, Borshuk points to studies that show people who devote time to volunteer activities and activism are more likely to be middle-class, women, students, and people with higher levels of education and a higher level of knowledge about social issues (2004:302). In the UK, a national survey (Institute for Volunteering Research, 1997) found volunteers were more likely to be people from the highest socio-economic groups, people in paid work, and those in middle age. This study found no gender difference however, with men and women equally as likely to volunteer.

asked me' as their reason for getting involved. A mixture of other reasons was given, both altruistic and self-interested, with many people citing a number of motivations. These included meeting one's own needs and those of family and friends, responding to a need in the community, seeking to improve things and help people, meeting people or making friends, learning new skills and having time to spare. Those non-volunteers who expressed an interest in volunteering were asked what would make it easier for them to get involved. Key encouragements noted were: being asked; if someone helped me get started; if family or friends were involved too; if I knew it would improve my skills; if I could do it from home; and if it led to a qualification.

Earthshare (2000) stress the importance of paying attention to the processes for recruiting new people, including 'providing welcoming and supportive orientation and follow through' and 'providing training, clear expectations and support'. They cite a number of resources for providing training in this area, including Flood and Lawrence (1987), Covey (1989) Pegg (1993) and Shields (1991).

- **Young people may respond to a focus on skills development**

The Institute for Volunteering Research (1997) suggests that when it comes to motivations for volunteering, young people are apparently less altruistic. Only 10% of 18-24 year olds cited a need in the community as a factor behind their decision to volunteer, compared with 26% of respondents overall. In contrast 28% of young people claimed to be motivated by the desire to learn new skills, compared to 15% overall.

This suggests that it might be worth exploring ways to promote the skill development opportunities that activism and advocacy offers, as a way of attracting and retaining young people.

Barriers and challenges faced by movements and organisations seeking to increase levels of activism

- **Lack of time**

For many people, lack of time, or perceived lack of time is clearly a barrier to involvement in various forms of civic engagement, including activism or advocacy.

For example, in the ABS (2004) survey on environmental concern and action mentioned above, 'lack of time' was overwhelmingly the reason given by people who had neither registered a concern nor donated time or money ('no time' was cited by 46%). Lack of time was also the main reason given by UK residents for not being involved in volunteering (Institute for Volunteering Research (1997)).

There is also evidence that existing volunteers are a group who are already particularly busy, or time-poor. This is not surprising given that they are more likely to be in paid work, and more likely to be parents. However, in addition ABS (2006) found that people who volunteer formally are also more likely than non-volunteers to be providing other kinds of informal services and support in the community. In 2006, 27% of volunteers were carers, compared with 17% of non-volunteers, and 63% of volunteers were providing informal help to other people in the community compared with 42% of non-volunteers. Volunteers were more likely to be providing each of the types of informal service to people living outside the home, namely emotional support, transport/errands, domestic work, child care, teaching and coaching (ABS 2006:14).

Australians may be particularly time-poor. On average, Australians work longer

hours than workers in many other countries – or any other country according to some (Tiffen and Gittins cited in Martin and Pixley 2005: 51). Further, there is evidence that the proportion of Australians working long and very long hours has steadily increased over the last two decades. This is especially the case among men, of whom 29% worked very long hours (50 or more per week) in 2002 (Watson et al cited in Martin and Pixley 2005:51). Over half of full-time workers surveyed (whether working very long hours or not) expressed a wish to work fewer hours (Martin and Pixley 2005). Some people may be feeling more ‘time poor’ than others. ABS data on perceptions of time shows that couples with dependant children are more likely than others to regularly feel pressed for time (ABS 1997: 12).

- **Other barriers**

Other than lack of time, reasons people gave for not registering their concern or donating money (in relation to environmental issues) included age/health/not able (cited by 10%), no money (6%), don’t know how to get involved (6%) don’t care/not interested (4%), don’t think it will make a difference (3%), no reason/don’t know (17%) (ABS 2004).

For respondents to the UK volunteering survey, key non-time related reasons for not volunteering were that they did not know any other volunteers, and they did not have the necessary skills/experience (Institute for Volunteering Research 1997).

Strategies for sustaining people’s involvement in movements and networks

While it seems likely that social movement organisations play an important role in sustaining people’s commitment to activism, there appears to be relatively little literature on precisely *how* organisations do this, and what strategies are most effective. There are some useful pointers and practical resources available, however. Some potentially useful strategies that draw on these resources are outlined below.

Earthshare Australia (<http://www.earthshare.org.au>) has a number of useful online resources for social change activists, including a ‘Social change training manual’ with practical tools and exercises that can be used to support activists. While the organisation’s focus is on environmental activism, their tools are of wide relevance and applicability, and draw on generic social change models and theories – including innovation diffusion, and Bill Moyer’s Movement Action Plan (see below). Other sources of similar material include:

- Queensland-based Change Agency (<http://www.thechangeagency.org/>),
- US-based Training for change (<http://www.trainingforchange.org/>)
- US-based Campaign Strategy (http://www.campaignstrategy.org)
- Netherlands-based Database of Successful Strategies and Tactics for the Common Good (<http://www.dbsst.org/>)

Drawing on these resources, some potentially useful strategies for supporting activists, and sustaining commitment and involvement, are outlined below.

- **Help people get some perspective on their movement or campaign**

Activism, while it undoubtedly has its rewards can be an exhausting and sometimes dispiriting process. Indeed, activist and theorist Bill Moyer’s work suggests that, rather than celebrating their successes, many activists are prone to negative perceptions about their movement’s progress. Unaware of the inevitable stages that

all social movements go through, they tend to perceive that their movement is failing, when it is merely progressing through the normal stages of a movement. This perception of failure 'leads to burnout, dropout, and the dissipation of movements' (Moyer 1987:4). Moyer's Movement Action Plan (MAP), which identifies eight stages of successful social movements, is a common reference for activists and theorists seeking to understand the dynamics of movements, and to put their own movement into perspective. Moyer suggests that this understanding and sense of perspective can help to 'give activists hope and empowerment, increase the effectiveness of social movements, and reduce the discouragement that often contributes to individual burnout, dropout, and the winding down of social movements' (Moyer 1987:5).

Earthshare Australia (2000) recommends workshops for activists that help them gain perspective on social change, by exploring 'change models' as a group. Such an approach, they argue can help people develop more realistic expectations, and prevent campaign setbacks from causing activists to be discouraged. It can also assist with group cohesion by validating a variety of roles and strategies within the same movement. Supporting activists to develop a broader perspective in this way can help them become more effective as well as helping to shift motivation from a short term to a long-term basis.

- **Celebrate achievements**

One aspect that activists could benefit from paying more attention to is the recognition and celebration of successes and achievements (Moyer 1987:37). While these are often overlooked, as Earthshare (2000) puts it, 'it is vital that the group does take time to celebrate, to validate achievements and provide impetus to carry on'.

- **Promote, ensure and build on the benefits of involvement**

One obvious means of improving the retention of existing activists and advocates is to focus on the potential personal benefits of their involvement. This means not only facilitating and supporting their involvement in a way that actually brings clear personal benefits, but also providing feedback and recognition and highlighting and promoting these benefits to both existing and potential activists.

A UK survey of volunteers provides some useful insights into the kinds of personal benefits that volunteers experience. These included: the enjoyment of the activity; the satisfaction of seeing results; meeting people; and a sense of personal achievement. Young people were more likely to cite instrumental benefits, the opportunity to learn new skills, to get a qualification, and to achieve a position in the community. Institute for Volunteering Research (1997).

- **Establish peer support groups**

Many authors stress the critical importance of establishing peer support groups. Earthshare (2000) suggest that support groups or 'affinity groups' can play an essential role in maintaining people's motivation for they allow a chance for reflection, challenge and affirmation. Support groups should address three kinds of support – emotional, support for action, and educational support.

- **Address the negative experiences of those currently involved**

In addition to building on the benefits of involvement, it is important to address and minimise the negative experiences of current activists and advocates if their involvement in the organisation is to be sustained.

Asking people about the negative aspects of their social change work can be useful in identifying the kinds of negative factors that need to be addressed. The main drawback of volunteering identified by UK volunteers was that their volunteering was poorly organised. Other criticisms were that they sometimes got bored with what they were asked to do; they could not always cope with the tasks they were given; their volunteering took up too much time; they did not get appreciation from their organisation; and they found themselves out-of-pocket (Institute for Volunteering Research 1997). The survey also asked those who had given up their volunteering why this was. A third said it was no longer relevant and 19% that they had moved away from the area. Other reasons included: that it was getting too much for them and that they could not spare the time (Institute for Volunteering Research (1997).

Another potentially negative aspect of activism that it can be useful to help people deal with is the common feelings of loss, grief, frustration anger and despair that accompany activism. Earthshare (2000) suggest that such feelings, if not properly acknowledged, can sap energy, block the ability to act for change, and lead to burnout. They offer tools and resources to help people acknowledge and deal with such feelings, suggesting that this can help turn them into 'a motivating force for acting positively for change'. Another useful source of practical exercises for this kind of work is Katrina Shields (1994).

Strategies for increasing people's level of activism (especially from e-activism to face-to-face activism)

- **Role of online participation, or e-activism**

One specific area of interest for TCCN is the role that online or 'e-activism' might play in both widening and deepening participation – that is, by both engaging a wider spectrum of people as activists, and increasing the level of activism, or types of activity undertaken by existing activists.

There is a small but growing literature on the role of the internet (and other electronic, digital or 'new media' technologies) in activism and political participation. Views are fairly divergent – as Ward et al (2003:652) point out, 'predictions about the role of the internet in political participation have ranged from a reinvigoration of the political process through increasing citizen engagement to the creation of a 'couch potato democracy' in which participation is mechanistic and unthinking'. The authors' review of competing claims about the internet's participatory potential, points to a divide between internet optimists and sceptics. Optimists point to the internet's ease of use and so lowered participatory costs and the efficiency with which it enables recruitment and mobilisation. They point to its ability to stimulate action through the provision of new information, to create virtual networks of activists, provide new forms of participation (such as e-polling or e-petitions), increase the equality of participation (because of the relative anonymity it offers) and increase organisational pluralism. On the other hand, sceptics question these claims, suggesting that the impact of the internet on political participation is likely to be moderate, or even minimal. On their view, such technologies will not have a dramatic impact on political participation, but rather will be absorbed into the current socio-political order and reproduce existing biases (Ward et al 2003, see also Ward et al 2002).

Ward et al (2003) suggest that the truth may lie somewhere in between these opposing views with the internet likely to make 'a modest contribution to participation and mobilisation' and attract some new participants – particularly young people. It may also deepen and extend participation, but again, this is likely to be a modest rather than a drastic change.

- **Can technology help to widen participation?**

A UK survey investigating attitudes and behaviour in relation to online political activity commissioned by Ward et al (2003) found that online politics was of limited interest for the vast majority of the population. Only 17% of internet users reporting having participated in online political activities. Further, the most common activities were the more passive types (such as looking for political information online or visiting an organisation's website), and online participation was dominated by the educated upper-middle classes and men. However, the authors make some caveats to this picture of 'participation as usual online'. First, young people formed the largest group of online participants – in contrast to their low levels of offline activism. Second, the survey found that some people (particularly younger people and those with lower socio-economic status) are engaged *only* in online participation. Third, many of those who visited a website for information said they would not have sought the information had it not been for the internet, and that they were more interested in an organisation after they had visited its website. These findings lead Ward et al to cautiously suggest that the internet could help to widen the pool of people who engage in political activities.

In their study of Liberal Democrat party members, Ward et al (2002, 2003) found some evidence that the party's website was helping to widen political participation by attracting new members – including younger members and people who were less politically engaged (2003:663). However, the authors concluded that on their own, these technologies are 'unlikely to radically alter the profile of party members or activists', rather they 'make it easier for predisposed supporters to become members ... and for parties to market themselves to the already sympathetic' (2002:214).

The marketing literature includes some investigation of what social factors influence involvement in virtual groups, from the perspective of how companies might better establish online communities that attract participation. Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo (2004), reflect that the factors such as ability to share or receive information may play an important part in people's motivators for getting involved in online communities, and observe differences in the characteristics of participants in different types of online forums, possibly related to the degree of consistent social interaction which each features.

- **Can technology help to deepen participation?**

Barraket (2005:24) notes that despite robust international debate about the impact of online technologies on civic engagement, there has been 'a relative dearth of empirical research conducted in Australia', both on this topic generally and on the specific issue of online engagement through third sector organisations.

A number of studies in Australia, the US and the UK have analysed organisations' websites to determine whether and how they are using online technology to engage their members and the broader public in their organisational activities. In a content analysis of the websites of 50 Australian third sector, or non-profit organisations Barraket (2005) found that while the organisations are using their online capacities to present information, they are less consistent in using this technology to mobilise new forms of interaction and civic engagement. In general, the sites were effective at providing (one-way) information about opportunities for offline collective activity, and at presenting options for *individualist* engagement online (such as e-petitions, and online donation or membership functions). However, the sites presented very limited options for *collective* engagement and interaction online.

Similarly, in their study of the 100 largest non-profit organisations in the US, Kang and Norton (2004) found that while most were using the internet effectively to present information, they were largely unsuccessful in creating 'a dialogic loop' or enabling 'interactive and relational communications' with their members and the

public.

In the UK, Ward et al (2003) conducted a similar study of the websites of 30 trade unions, parties, NGOs and protest networks. They made similar findings – most conveyed information well, but far fewer made good use of campaigning, mobilising, interactive and participatory features (although they do note that a number of the NGOs in their study were starting to develop e-activism features).

Such studies suggest that some of the reasons that the internet is not deepening participation to the extent that it might lie in the failings of organisations themselves to fully exploit its potential. Ward et al found that many of the organisations they studied offered limited opportunities for online participation and admitted to lacking a sophisticated strategy for use of information communication technologies. Indeed the authors noted that ‘the sophistication of many government and political sites lags well behind that of the corporate sector’ (2003: 657). Similarly Kang and Norton (2004), argue that the failure of many organisations to create dialogue with their publics is a public relations failure that could be remedied with the design of more sophisticated websites that use the many ‘relational communication functions’ that the internet offers. They suggest that if organisations used these tools more effectively they could boost their levels of volunteering and fundraising and enable ‘two-way communication’ with their publics.

It is by no means clear however, that all it takes to increase participation is a well designed website or communications strategy. In a case study survey of online UK Liberal Democrat party members (Ward et al 2002) asked whether web and email communication from the party had led members to undertake a number of participatory activities (such as contacting other members, volunteering time, taking part in a campaign or attending a rally or meeting). They found it made only a marginal difference. Very low numbers had been prompted to take such actions as a result of viewing the party website (from 2-8% for the various actions), while slightly more had responded to emails from the party (from 5-13%). The actions most commonly taken in response to an email were contacting other members, volunteering time / work, participating in a campaign and contacting the party with views or comments. Emails were most likely to prompt activism amongst those members who were already active, and those who were more frequent users of email. This is consistent with Norris (2003) who finds that political communication via electronic means tends to appeal largely to those who are already politically engaged or active.

Compared to other studies, a survey of members of the UK-based Countryside Alliance found the internet to be effective in stimulating offline action – almost a third of members who visited the website reported that it was an important influence on their decision to participate in a protest march on London (Ward et al 2003:662).

In addition to questioning whether it has the positive potential that some commentators have claimed, a number of authors see the increasing use of e-activism as having potentially negative consequences. Levine (2004) has a number of concerns about ‘online civil society’, including that access to internet connections remains inequitable, and that increasing use of the internet may be leading to social disengagement by replacing robust social bonds of trust and mutual obligation with superficial and contingent ones, and threatening public deliberation by allowing users to employ sophisticated techniques to filter out information that they do not want to hear, thereby limiting communication across ideological divides and removing the need to work through differences.

Ward et al (2002), writing about political party membership, suggest that increasing use of information communication technologies is actually increasing the more passive forms of membership activity (reading information, paying fees etc). While

the interactive and networking possibilities of the technology may offer the *potential* to deepen member participation, these capacities were of least interest to the party members surveyed by the authors. Further, they suggest that these technologies are more successful at cementing the connection of individuals to party headquarters, rather than increasing their connection to each other. Their increasing use, they conclude, 'is likely to enhance pre-existing trends towards individualisation and more direct relations between elites and members rather than reviving collective grassroots democracy' (2002:214).

There is a growing literature about the extent to which online activity is transforming civil society and democracy generally, and collective action, social movements and advocacy specifically. There is also debate about the nature of the relationship between online and offline modes of political and community engagement, interaction and communication. There has not been room to go into this literature in this project, but Jensen et al (2007) and Barraket (2005) provide brief overviews of the field.

- **Are there benchmarks for response rates to e-activist campaigns?**
- **What kind of 'critical mass' is required for effective e-campaigns?**

One research question of interest is whether there are benchmarks for response rates to a call for action issued by an activist or advocacy organisation to its members, subscribers, or contacts. e-activism is a relatively new phenomenon and there appears to be relatively little literature that evaluates the use of email as a tool to encourage an organisation's members or subscribers to take action. This makes it difficult to establish a 'benchmark' or accepted 'good response rate'. However there are some pointers in the research.

The best-known e-activism organisation in Australia is GetUp, which currently has around 190,000 members. When initiating a new campaign, GetUp sends an email to all these members asking them to take some kind of action – usually signing an electronic petition. Some response rates for recent GetUp campaigns are as follows:

- Campaign for a conscience vote on abortion drug RU486: 15,000 signed a petition or wrote a letter to an MP
- Call on PM to develop an exit strategy for Iraq: 40,000 signed a petition
- Pre-budget call for an increase in funding for the ABC: 75,000 signatories
- Campaign against the proposed migration bill: 100,000 signatories.

Some of these campaigns ran for longer than others, and total membership has risen over the period, making defining a benchmark difficult. However, it can be seen that response rates vary significantly, and as a very rough guide it appears that GetUp campaigns are achieving response rates ranging from around 10% to over 50% of members depending on the campaign.⁵

In their survey of UK internet users, Ward et al (2003) found that 84% had never received an email from an organisation with a political message about the organisation or a campaign. Of those who had received such messages, just under a third ignored them, one fifth reported sometimes or always responding, and the

⁵ Another complication is that it is impossible to tell whether petition signatories are all GetUp members, because it is common practice (and encouraged by GetUp) for members to forward links to petitions to their friends – who may sign it without joining GetUp), so the response rate of actual *members* is likely to be lower than these rough estimates.

remainder reported occasionally reading the message.

The US-based *eNonProfit Benchmarks Study* (Smith et al 2006) is described as the 'first of its kind'. The study looked at the effectiveness of 15 major American non-profit organisations, which had substantial online communications and marketing programs that attempted to raise money and influence public policy. The study has chapters on return on investment, email messaging, email list growth, email list composition, online advocacy and online fundraising. The full report is available online (www.e-benchmarksstudy.com) and is recommended as a potentially useful resource.

With regard to possible benchmarks for e-activism campaigns, the study analysed email response rates for advocacy and fundraising emails sent by these organisations over a 12-month period between 2004 and 2005. For the advocacy emails, the authors found an 'open rate' (proportion of email recipients who opened the message) of 26 percent and a 'response rate' (proportion of recipients who took an advocacy action⁶) of 10 percent (2006:12).

Smith et al also consider the factors that influence the success rates of various advocacy organisations in generating online advocacy actions. They found the following factors to be significant:

- the frequency with which advocacy action messages were sent to the organisation's e-mail list (i.e. those organisations that sent a call for action two or more times per month generated a higher number of actions over the year than those that emailed their list less frequently)
- organisation list size (the larger the list, the higher the number of actions generated over the year)
- duration of online advocacy program (organisations with longstanding experience in online advocacy generate more actions than those with less experience – this was found to be more significant than the average length of time members had been on the list)
- online communications budget (the organisations that had the most success at generating online actions were those with the largest budget for such programs) (2006: 31-33).

Based on the results of the study, Smith et al have compiled a list of 'best practices' – or ways that nonprofit organizations can improve the overall success of their online communications program. The suggested strategies are included at Appendix A.

• **Can online methods increase offline activism?**

There appears to be inconclusive evidence as to the potential for organisations to use e-activism to increase the *offline* activism of their members. Smith et al include a case study of a US non-profit, Environmental Defense that attempted to move online activists into offline activism – inviting those who signed a petition online to participate in monthly advocacy meetings in their local area. This was done using Meetup.com, described as an 'online tool for arranging social and networking get-togethers'. The strategy is described in this case study as 'a mixed success' – while thousands registered to attend meetings, far fewer actually turned up and it was also difficult to recruit volunteers to lead these events. However, the organisation did experience other benefits – those who did attend a Meetup event subsequently became even more active online, and it also appears that they were more likely to remain subscribed to the list than those who did not attend a meeting (Smith et al

⁶ Advocacy actions are typically online petitions to politicians, and sometimes other decision-makers. Online advocacy can include other actions, but it appears that these are less common – for example Smith et al found that of those who took an advocacy action, just 8 per cent edited or personalised their 'citizen letter'.

2006:35). Australian online organisation GetUp has also recently begun experimenting with offline meetings – or ‘GetTogethers’ of its online activists, although it is too early to judge the success of this strategy in increasing the offline activity of its online members.

- **Evaluating online methods**

Coffman (2007:4) stresses that ‘as advocacy tactics evolve we need to make sure that the measures we use to assess them are meaningful’. For example, in the evaluation of email campaigns, ‘an obvious and common measure is the number of emails that actually get sent after a call to action is issued’. However, Coffman stresses the need to question ‘whether the measure itself has evaluative worth’. The number of emails sent may not reflect a campaigns’ success – some may not have got through (there is evidence for example that US Congress is increasingly blocking such emails), and even if they did, the intended recipients may not see or take notice of them, let alone be influenced by them.

Effective communications to maximise interest and involvement

Behaviour change theory should make us extremely cautious about assuming that information and communications campaigns can ‘cause’ people to act. However, effective communication strategies are a key tool that, used in conjunction with other strategies, can help to support and motivate people to participate in activism or advocacy.

A limitation of much of the literature in this field from the perspective of this project is that it focuses on communicating an ‘outcome message’ (such as better health, or environmentally sustainable behaviour). This is slightly different to the focus on *process* that TCCN is interested in, where the aim is to improve levels of activism and advocacy per se. While this activity is of course taken with an understanding that improved health outcomes are the desired outcome, focus in this project is on the activism and advocacy itself, as actions that are a means to that end. Consequently, the concern here is not so much how to communicate a cancer control message (which is a whole other part of TCCN’s work), but how to communicate a message about activism and advocacy that happens to be on the *issue* of cancer control.

This limitation has meant that it has not been considered a priority to focus the scarce resources of this project on literature from the field of communications. It is also assumed that TCCN has many existing experts in this field, given the extensive communication and information activities it conducts in the area of cancer control. However, while it has not been possible to canvass the communications literature in any depth, some brief findings are provided below, particularly where they appear to have potential for application in the area of communicating activism and advocacy.

- **The social marketing approach**

The dominant approach to communications for social change is to build a communications strategies on the principles of social marketing. The field of social marketing is a useful reference point for this project. As well as the many books written on the subject, here are a number of useful short summaries of social marketing, its development as a concept, and its main principles (see for example, MacFadyen et al 1999, McKenzie-Mohr). The social marketing approach is outlined briefly below.

As McKenzie-Mohr explains it, the social marketing approach challenges two common and problematic assumptions, namely that:

1. Changes in behaviour are brought about by increasing public knowledge and

- information, and
2. Individuals systematically evaluate choices and then act in their own economic self-interest.

Campaigns that rely on these assumptions have largely been unsuccessful (see McKenzie-Mohr for a number of examples in the environmental field), because they are based on a flawed understanding of human behaviour.

Rather than assuming that the provision of information is enough to cause people to make rational, predictable choices about actions then, social marketing assumes that the reasons people choose to act are complex, and involve (among other things) the interaction of various kinds of barriers and motivations. McKenzie-Mohr (nd(a):1) describes the social marketing approach as one that focuses on both removing the barriers to an activity and enhancing its benefits.

In order to do this, a number of steps are necessary before developing a strategy. Firstly, there is a need to clarify the goal – or the precise behaviour that you want to promote. McKenzie-Mohr argues that too often the behavioural goal is often framed in terms that are far too general. It is important to be specific because different behaviours have different barriers and benefits. Once the desired behaviour is defined in specific terms, the second step is to identify the barriers that people face in adopting that behaviour. These may internal or external barriers or a combination of both. McKenzie-Mohr (nd(b)) suggests a literature review, focus groups and surveys as ways to identify barriers for particular groups of people – and cautions against the common assumption that the barriers are already known.

Social marketing is often simply described as the application of concepts and tools from commercial marketing to the field of social change⁷. However a more complete definition is that used by the UK National Social Marketing Centre (www.nsms.org.uk), which describes an integrated approach that uses not just marketing, but also learning and experience from the social sciences and social policy:

Social marketing, like all good approaches, is dynamic and evolving. Increasingly, we talk of social marketing as having two parents. The social parent draws on the best learning and skills from the social sciences and social policy areas, including public health and health promotion. The marketing parent brings the best of both commercial and public sector marketing approaches. (National Social Marketing Centre, 2006:6)

Social marketing programs aim to influence individuals to change their behaviour in the interests of a 'social good'. The approach is closely linked to the field of health promotion, in which it is one technique used to improve health outcomes. However, it can be and is applied in a wide variety of contexts to achieve many different kinds of 'behaviour change'.

Insights from the field of social marketing are potentially useful in helping to answer some of the research questions posed in this project, because strategies that aim to motivate people to become involved in activism or advocacy, or to sustain such involvement are arguably social marketing strategies – they aim to 'influence people to take actions that are in the interests of a social good'.

An overview of some of the key insights from social marketing that appear relevant to the research questions for this project is provided below.

The UK National Social Marketing Centre (www.nsms.org.uk) defines three key

⁷ See for example, the definition used by the US-based Social Marketing Institute (www.social-marketing.org).

elements of social marketing, namely:

1. Its primary aim is to achieve a particular 'social good' (rather than commercial benefit) with specific behavioural goals clearly identified and targeted.
2. It is a systematic process phased to address short, medium and long-term issues.
3. It utilises a range of marketing techniques and approaches (a marketing mix).

The NSMC suggest six key features and concepts of social marketing, that are illustrated in their 'consumer triangle', reproduced below:

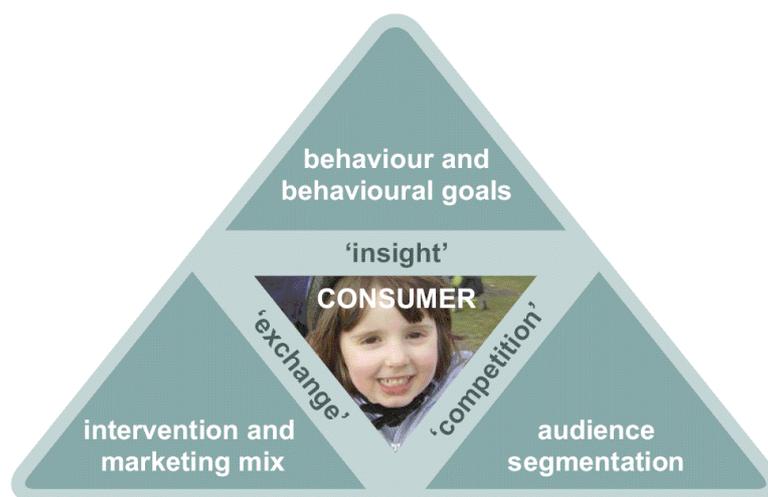


Figure 3: The 'consumer triangle' of social marketing
(www.nsms.org.uk)

The key features illustrated in this diagram are explained as follows: (adapted from NSMC, 2006).

- **Customer or consumer orientation:** high importance is attached to understanding the consumer as an individual within a social context. This means taking care to discover where the person is starting from, their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, along with the social context in which they live and work. This approach helps to avoid top-down approaches, and makes sure that 'interventions respond to the needs and wants of the person rather than the person having to fit around those of the service'.
- **Behaviour and behavioural goals:** there is a need to both understand existing behaviour and the key influences on it, and to develop clear behavioural goals. Behavioural goals should include both long-term goals and measurable steps towards these goals.
- **'Intervention mix' and 'marketing mix':** this refers to the need to both select the interventions that are most likely to be effective, from a number of possible options, and to use a range or 'mix' of different interventions, rather than relying on a single approach
- **Audience segmentation:** understanding the complex ways in which people can be grouped and profiled (especially how different people are responding to an issue and what motivates them) in order to target interventions effectively
- **'Exchange':** this concept refers to the need to understand what is being offered to the consumer and what the costs and benefits of accepting the offer are, or the 'real cost to them'.
- **'Competition':** refers to the need to understand the various factors that

impact on the consumer and that compete for their attention and time.

This is one potentially useful conceptual framework for the current project. It places the 'consumer' – in this case, the person who we are trying engage in activism or advocacy at the centre of the picture. It suggests a need to clearly define the kinds of actions we are expecting this person to take, and to understand the social context in which this person will receive the 'invitation' to act, as well as the motivations and barriers for that person to take the suggested action. Only by completing all the pieces of this jigsaw will it be possible to tailor a specific mix that of strategies that will be most likely to be effective.

One useful website that is founded on the principles of community-based social marketing is *Tools of Change: Proven Methods for Promoting Health, Safety and Environmental Citizenship* (www.toolsofchange.com). Sponsored by Environment Canada, this site obviously has an environmental focus, however it contains a number of tools that may be useful in other contexts. The tools are described as providing 'fundamental ways of motivating people to take the action you wish them to take'. Each tool contains step-by-step instructions, examples and space to plan a specific program. These tools may be useful reference for TCCN, however they are fairly generic and would need to be adapted to a given situation. The tools are more useful for helping define the questions that need to be asked in developing a strategy rather than for answering them for TCCN's situation. However, some of the tools that may be of most use are 'Building motivation over time', 'Norm appeals', 'Overcoming specific barriers', 'peer support groups' and 'word of mouth'.

McKenzie-Mohr also describes a number of similar 'tools of behaviour change'.⁸ These include:

- **Commitment** – seeking people's commitment to an action has been shown to alter the way they perceive themselves and the way they think other people perceive them, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will act on that commitment. Commitments that are written, made publicly, or made in groups are particularly effective.
- **Prompts** – useful in overcoming the common barrier of forgetfulness and reminding people to act
- **Norms** – community norms have a significant impact on people's behaviour, so the development and inclusion in behaviour change programs of norms, reinforced via personal contact can be effective strategy
- **Communication** – effective communication strategies are those that are based on an understanding of the audience, use captivating information from a credible source, 'frame' the message appropriately and include an element of personal contact (for more on the elements of effective communication see below)
- **Incentives** – visible incentives that are clearly linked to the behaviour, and that reward positive behaviour can be effective, particularly when motivation for people to engage in the behaviour is low.

• **Elements of successful communications**

There is a high degree of agreement among these publications about the key considerations for a successful communication strategy, and the essential tasks that must be part of the development of such a strategy. These can be summarised as:

1. **define clear, realistic communication objectives** – a specific behavioural goal or change to aim for. Robinson (2004) describes this as 'the tangible benefits

⁸ More detail on each of these tools, and examples of how they have been used can be found in McKenzie-Mohr's online guide to community-based social marketing (www.cbsm.com).

you would like to see flow from your communications work'. Fenton Communications (2001: 5-6) argue that organisations too often choose the wrong goal, and this makes it extremely difficult both to communicate the message, and to measure progress.

2. **define the intended audience** – different audiences will need different communications approaches (Robinson). It is more effective to carefully define the particular segment of people you intend to reach than to try to communicate too broadly to 'the general public'. Fenton Communications call this the task of refining the audience 'from massive to manageable' (2001: 8).
3. **understand the audience** – understanding the particular audience includes considering their demographic characteristics, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour, and relevant barriers and motivations. This should be based on research, not assumptions (Fenton 2001:16, McKenzie-Mohr, Benton Foundation 2002).
4. **shape or frame the message** to suit the audience. McKenzie-Mohr (nd(a): 5) stresses the need to make sure the message is 'captivating' by making it 'vivid, personal and concrete'. Fenton Communications stress the need to create a message that resonates with the target audience, not with the staff of the organisation creating the message (2001:9-10). They also suggest that 'it is easier to motivate someone around something they already believe than to convince them of something new', and that 'making an emotional connection that touches a pre-existing belief turns passive support into action' (2001:11-12). The message itself should clearly tell people what to do, by giving them 'bite-size doable tasks' and why they should do it now (2001:20-21).
5. **identify the means of communication** that will suit the audience. There will be a relationship between this point and the previous ones, for as Benton (2002) point out, what media you choose 'will impact your message and limit your audience'. Whoever delivers the message needs to be credible and trusted (McKenzie-Mohr, Fenton 2001: 26), and preferably someone whom the audience already knows or interacts with (Robinson 2001).
6. **Maximise personal contact to foster diffusion** – whatever the details of a particular communication strategy, it should include some means of fostering social diffusion. Building in some form of personal contact is seen as critical, as it is interactions with other people, particularly people who 'model' the behaviour, that are the most powerful influence on our own attitudes and behaviour (McKenzie-Mohr nd(a): 5, Robinson 2006). The US Department of Health and Human Services advises that interpersonal, group and organisational/community communication channels are 'far more likely to be trusted and influential than media sources' (2004:28).

Diffusion of innovation theory suggests that encouraging diffusion involves focusing on both the innovation itself (the characteristics that will improve its chances of adoption) and on communication channels and social systems (the networks with members, norms and social structures in which communications is a two-way process) (US Department of Health and Human Services 2004: 226). It also requires communicators to think carefully about the potential audience. Not everyone is at the same stage of readiness to change, and people at different stages will respond to different strategies. Diffusion of innovation theory can help identify where particular people are located on the 'innovation adoption curve' (see Robinson 2001:5 for a brief explanation of this).

- **Other tools and guides for effective communication for social change**
- The Benton Foundation (2002) capacity building project documented best practices and lessons learned by non-profit organisations about strategic communications. The toolkit details the key phases of developing an effective

communications strategy, and as such may be a useful resource to guide communications planning (<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/toolkits/stratcommtool.html>).

- Fenton Communications (2001) outline ‘nine laws of successful advocacy communications’.
- Social change media has an online ‘how-to’ of communications planning, with ten ‘essential steps’ (http://media.socialchange.net.au/planning_comms/10steps.html).
- The US Department of Health and Human Services (2004) publication *Making health communication programs work*, is a guide to planning, developing, implementing and evaluating a health communications program. The guide is written within a social marketing framework, and covers each of these program stages in some detail. While the focus is on communicating health messages themselves rather than activism or advocacy strategies, a useful general observation transferable to this project is that the development of communications approaches should draw on established social science theories and models of change. The value of such theoretical frameworks is that they ‘offer different perspectives on the intended audiences and on the steps that can influence their change’ (2004: 7).

Measuring and evaluating the success of activism and advocacy strategies

The review has briefly touched on some of the available literature that concerns the ‘measurement’ or evaluation of activism and advocacy. Some of this may be useful in assisting TCCN to develop conceptual frameworks for evaluating its own work in this area.

- **How should we evaluate activism and advocacy? What should we measure?**

Weiss (2007:1) describes advocacy as ‘one of those “hard to measure” activities’ that non-profit organisations engage in. While there is a degree of comfort with the evaluation of direct service provision, there is less certainty about how to evaluate advocacy.

On one level, the ultimate measure of activism or advocacy strategies seems clear – did they change policy outcomes? However, many authors argue that in evaluating activism and advocacy there is a need to look more broadly than whether or not public policy change is achieved. For example, Reisman et al write that:

‘While an important focus, improved policies are rarely achieved without changes in the preconditions to policy change’ (2007:17).

Coffman (2007:3) also argues that ‘it is important to assess advocacy for more than just its impact on policy’, because much advocacy work results in a series of changes other than those at the level of public policy. These can include, for example the building of coalitions with other organisations, the development of relationships with the media, or the emergence of new advocates and spokespeople. Such ‘interim or intermediate outcomes’ should not be trivialised in any evaluation of advocacy – indeed, they ‘can be as important as the policy change itself’. As Reisman et al (2007:17) point out; the development of such capacities is a ‘critical organizational condition of advocacy and policy change efforts’.

Many other authors stress the need to value these capacity building outcomes in any evaluation of advocacy work by non-profits. Egbert and Hoechstetter (2007) point out that these kinds of outcomes often represent the most visible progress made by non-profits, and should be valued as a key outcome measure.

Louie and Guthrie (2007:5) advocate a “prospective approach” to assessing policy change work. Prospective evaluation involves defining short and long-term goals up front and then evaluating advocates’ progress towards those goals as the project progresses. This means that rather than being conducted only at end of a project, evaluation is integrated throughout the project’s implementation. This approach acknowledges that policy change is an ambitious and long-term goal, but that it is possible and useful to provide ‘indicators of success’ along the way. Benchmarks should be defined in advance that will show progress – not just towards the overall longer term goal, but also towards the building of internal capacity for policy advocacy. Capacity building benchmarks are especially important as they ‘indicate growth in an asset that can be applied to both current and future projects’. Further, ‘advocates have more control over and therefore can be held more accountable for capacity-building goals’.

Many authors (for example, Coffman 2007:3-4, Egbert and Hoechstetter 2007) acknowledge that most advocacy organisations will face time and resource constraints when it comes to evaluation, which will mean they need to keep their approach to evaluation simple, and manageable. Notwithstanding this, Robinson argues that evaluation should be seen as a learning opportunity for organisations, and ‘an inherent part of the process for change’ (2001:9-10). Done well he argues, evaluation can be a valuable feedback tool that can help with the design of effective future strategies (as opposed to a dull reporting mechanism undertaken only to satisfy managers or funders).

Robinson’s principles for conducting effective evaluation of this kind include:

- Seek out values rather than avoiding them
- Create room for unexpected insights into the audience’s attitudes and aspirations
- Focus on the potential for future change rather than only measuring change achieved so far (2001:10)

In their useful guide to defining and documenting the effectiveness of advocacy and policy strategies Reisman et al (2007) suggest a core set of outcome categories, which may be useful in helping to define *what* to measure in relation to advocacy and policy strategies. Some categories represent what the authors call ‘the interim steps and infrastructure that create the conditions for social change’, while others reflect long-term policy-related goals. The suggested outcome categories for advocacy and policy work are as follows:

- 1. Shifts in social norms** (the knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviors that compose the normative structure of culture and society)
- 2. Strengthened organizational capacity** (skill set, staffing and leadership, organizational structure and systems, finances and strategic planning among non-profit organizations and coalitions).
- 3. Strengthened alliances** (with other advocacy partners)
- 4. Strengthened base of support** (among the general public, interest groups, and opinion leaders, and including increases in civic participation and activism)
- 5. Improved policies** (in the public policy arena – including policy

development, policy proposals, demonstration of support, adoption, funding, and implementation.

6. Changes in impact (the ultimate and long-term changes in social and physical lives and conditions that motivate policy change efforts) (Reisman et al: 2007:17).

The authors' list of outcome examples and strategies that might be appropriate for each of these outcome areas is reproduced at Appendix B.

Fenton Communications (2006), suggests a similar list of outcomes for measuring the success of communications strategies:

1. Advances in advocacy goals
2. Changes in behaviour
3. Funds raised
4. Growth in membership
5. Building the skills of the organisation's staff
6. Building new relationships with influential people
7. Reframing of the issue (influencing people's perceptions and beliefs about the issue)
8. Introduction of a new word or catch phrase into public debate
9. Strengthening of the organisation's position, brand and power (improving public perception of the organisation)

As can be seen, there is considerable overlap between these two lists of outcomes.

- **What measures are used by other organisations/movements to evaluate what they do?**

Reflections on the question of measurement and evaluation from representatives of the organisations interviewed for this project are included in Part 3 below.

• PART 3: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

This section discusses the findings from the series of interviews conducted by the author with representatives of non-profit activism and advocacy organisations. The interviews were conducted either on the telephone or face-to-face, and were recorded and transcribed to assist with analysis.

The methodology used for this component of the project was semi-structured interviewing. A series of pre-formed questions (see Appendix C) were used to guide the interviews, and ensure coverage of at least some of the main research questions. However, the approach was a flexible one that sought to allow the interviewee to set the direction of the interview to some extent. This means that each individual question was not necessarily asked of every interviewee. Some interviewees addressed a number of issues in their answer to a single question, and some made clear in their answers that particular questions that might have been asked subsequently were not relevant to them. This meant that the author used her judgement as to which questions it was appropriate to ask in order to balance coverage of the research topics with allowing the interviewee to talk about the issues that they saw to be most relevant, all within a relatively short timeframe.

The findings from these interviews are discussed below, and have been organised under headings relevant to the project research questions. Direct quotations from interviewees have been indented in the text, or indicated by ‘...’ marks.

Disclaimer:

The views and opinions of the interviewees are their own, and do not necessarily represent the official policy position of their organisations.

Relevance of the research questions to interviewees

There was a keen interest among all interviewees in the questions that inform this research project. The question of how organizations can develop more effective strategies for mobilising and engaging people in activism was one that interviewees easily related to. In fact, the research questions were questions to which all of the interviewees had given much thought, and to which their organizations devote significant effort and resources in exploring. These kinds of questions were not seen as peripheral, but rather they go to the very heart of the work that non-profit activism or advocacy organisations do, they structure the way these organisations view their very reason for being:

[O]ur power relies on support of the public. So we need to engage people actively in our campaigns (Hepburn)

I think that the conservatives, the way in which the conservatives use power is through think tanks and narrow ideas. They only need to organise money to organise power. We need to organise people to organise power on our side of politics. So these questions about participation are critical to rebuilding our power. (Tattersall)

[W]e’re an activist based organisation and we really firmly believe that activism is the tool that we have that converts our knowledge and our expertise and our research on human rights issues actually into a force for change. (Campbell Case)

At our 2007 AGM, a strategy called ‘Mobilising for Impact’ was approved by

the delegation. It is our biggest organisational development project for the immediate future and is about activist growth and activism effectiveness. (Campbell Case)

For Tattersall, her thinking about how to engage people effectively is set within the context of the 'deep debate and discussion' that has taken place within the union movement, particularly in response to the recent decline in union membership:

[O]ur challenge has been the decline in union membership over the past 25 years. This decline is in part because of shifts in the institutional apparatus that supported unions as well as shifts in the economy from a manufacturing to a service economy. Over the past 10 years you have seen the union movements reponse to this crisis. The idea of organising has been our response to this – we have had very robust and deep debate and discussion about organising in the union movement and how to institutionalise and hand over the skills around organising. (Tattersall)

Motivations for, and barriers to activism

Interviewees pointed to a number of motivators for people to become involved with their organisation. These included the reputation or perception of the organisation:

ACF has existed for over 40 years in Australia, so it has a certain currency in the community (Morrell).

I think it's that it's a credible voice that they want to be supporting. I think it's well known that ACF plays quite a strong role in policy development, environmental policy development. So we're seen as those people, I guess, working in the back corridors to try and improve environmental outcomes in the halls of power (Morrell).

[B]ecause Greenpeace is such a strong public brand, we just have this incredible pool of volunteers – we've got, I don't know how many applications every day, for people wanting to volunteer in the office. (Hepburn)

The relationship, or fit, between people's values and those of the organization was also identified an important motivating factor:

[A] lot of people who support us are people who like the fact that Greenpeace is bold. It's courageous. They're the kind of values that people attribute to the organisation and that we self-identify with. I mean, we take direct action. We do non-violent direct action. ... We've got people getting in between the harpoons and the whales. Those kind of very bold, confrontational, but non-violent, peaceful protests, I think inspire a lot of people to support Greenpeace. (Hepburn)

Some people are motivated by a broad set of values. The union movement is engaged by questions of justice, but also the value of collectivism and people sticking together as a value. These values and cultural norms are a key to the strength of the union movement in the past, ... there was a whole set of cultural institutions that underpinned the union movement, this is part of what we need to rebuild. We need a return to these values more broadly – which may build a stronger political and social culture as well as a strong union movement. It is about strengthening collectivism and having a sense of belonging together, which is underpins our power. (Tattersall)

Another motivator cited was the idea that people 'want to be doing the right thing' in their personal lives and that organisations can help support them to do this:

The program that I work on is GreenHome, and that's very much focused at outreach and education, but very practical solutions to the environment. And overwhelmingly, that's what people are interested in. There's some disjunct between – unless they're doing something in their own lives, they feel like a hypocrite to start asking for policy changes, unless they're – their sphere of influence is their local community, their local house, their family, their friends, their own – how long they take a shower. So they want solutions for that. (Morrell)

I think lots of people just have a sense of personal moral obligation I think, for social justice and that's one of the key motivators for getting involved with organisations, including Amnesty. It's in their nature to participate in that kind of work, so that's one of the key motivators, I think. They sort of feel it's their moral duty to do something. (Campbell Case)

Another possible motivator for people to become involved is the feeling that they have a specific skill or kind of expertise to contribute:

.... if they were able to, if they had expertise in certain areas. We have quite flexible ways of being able to work with volunteers, and activists can directly contribute to the development of our campaigns and the roll out of our campaigns. So us being able to draw upon their area of expertise is a motivator as well. (Campbell Case)

Feeling inspired or motivated by seeing others taking action was also mentioned as something that motivates involvement:

Our membership or our applications to join local groups goes up significantly after we've been in the media. People will see us on TV doing something. Then people will go oh, that's really cool. I really support that. I want to get involved in it. They'll give us a call or send as an email and ask to get involved. (Hepburn)

So this morning there was a bunch of student activists up in Newcastle that locked onto and shut down a coal loader in the world's biggest coal port. Yesterday, there was a bunch of students who shut down a coal-fired power station by locking onto the conveyors. It was done by students. But I think, to some extent, Greenpeace plays a role in inspiring that kind of action, which is the stuff that we do, but we don't just want us to be doing it. We'd like to be inspiring others to go out and do that stuff themselves as well. (Hepburn)

As well as talking about some of the motivators, interviewees were acutely aware of the many barriers that people face to getting involved with activism. Indeed, as Amnesty found in the focus groups they ran:

[T]here are loads of barriers, way more barriers identified than there were motivators! (Campbell Case)

One of the general barriers mentioned was the level of disengagement from political issues that is exhibited by many people:

Look, I think in a general sense, a lot of people won't get active because they don't believe that they can make any difference. I think there's a level of disengagement with the political process and disengagement with, you know – with the world. There's a whole bunch of theorising that goes on about Gen X or Gen Y or whatever and the kind of narcissism of our age. That means that people just feel like they can't be arsed basically doing anything. (Hepburn)

[The focus groups found] a general lack of knowledge, or issues seemed too big, or too many and they didn't believe they could actually make a difference ... Other barriers included the lack of a visible effectiveness of participation – especially with the work that we do, I mean, you know, creating visible actual human rights change can take a very long time. So not being able to see instant results... (Campbell Case)

Campbell Case also suggests that some people find it particularly difficult to engage with global issues:

Australians may sometimes struggle to relate to the issues that we work on. Because traditionally we've always worked on issues elsewhere. It's not the case any more, but I think it's still very much an opinion that people have about Amnesty. And a lot of the work that we do do is focussed on other countries and other people. So I suppose if people want to make a direct impact on something in their own community, they might not necessarily choose us. (Campbell Case)

A number of interviewees pointed to the issue of 'information overload', and the difficulty of cutting through the masses of information that people are exposed to and actually engaging them:

There's so much information that we have to process as it is. You've got to be able to fight through that. (Tattersall)

...the proliferation of competing interests. Including compassion fatigue. So people [in the focus groups] felt bombarded and they couldn't make decisions about where best to put their energy. So I guess there was a bit of torpor there. (Campbell Case)

However, it seems that even if activism is on people's 'radars', it is not necessarily viewed in a positive light, and in fact for many people the negative connotations that they associate with activism are a significant barrier to involvement:

I would probably think from my perspective, there's like an image barrier ... I think there's probably a perception of you'll be a hippie if you take environmental action. But this is changing now where it is quite common for people to be engaging with the environment and those older stereotypes are breaking down. Many people are doing activism yet would not label themselves as that – it's just become part of their persona – ie. online activism. (Morrell)

I think some people see us as a young people's organisation. And that if you're not a young, feral greenie kind of person, then there's no real role for you in Greenpeace. That's something that I guess we think is out there. (Hepburn)

I think [in the focus groups] there were definitely some negative connotations with the word activism. (Campbell Case)

The Amnesty focus groups also uncovered a level of scepticism among some people about charities:

There was definite concern about how funds are distributed by charities, which is another barrier to being involved. (Campbell Case)

Further, at least some people hold significant fears about the possible personal consequences of involvement in activism:

The fear of being exposed. Some participants worried that activism might

expose them to verbal abuse, involve them in illegal activities, expose them to physical attack, might be life threatening, that kind of stuff. (Campbell Case)

Even where the fears are not this extreme, there may also be a fear of commitment:

[T]hey didn't know what would be required of them. So if they put up their hand to be involved, they weren't actually sure what kind of commitment that was going to require. Research that Amnesty's done around the world is that people feel that becoming a supporter of Amnesty, an active supporter particularly, is kind of like signing your name in blood, it's like you're signing a contract for the rest of your life! There's a lot of guilt associated with that. (Campbell Case)

One comment made by Tattersall suggests that organisations often underestimate how intimidating it can be for people to join a group of any kind:

People need to go back and remind themselves what it felt like when they joined the organisation. What it was like when they got involved in activism. Because frankly, your average 19 year old's experience with getting involved in something, is going to be similar to their own experience when they first got involved. All the terror and fear and nervousness and whatever that they felt the first time... (Tattersall)

Another barrier mentioned was geography:

I think one of the big barriers is actually geography. We're working on it, we're starting to invest significantly in it. But up to this point, we haven't really nailed or really figured out a use of online communications to enable people, who aren't within earshot of one of our offices or one of our local groups, to get involved. So that's a big area that we want to change and invest in. (Hepburn)

An important perception-related barrier was raised by Hepburn, who pointed out that for many people, activism just doesn't look much fun:

I think generally with volunteering and activism, people don't have as much fun as they could. They get visions of going, sitting around in a cold church hall on a Tuesday night. Sitting around, talking about, going through boring minutes. And just talking endlessly in circles. I think we try to, but struggle to make our volunteering opportunities really exciting and engaging and inspiring for people. I mean, if it's not fun, people aren't going to keep on doing it. (Hepburn)

This need to make activism look fun is also acknowledged by Nicholas when she describes one of the main 'messages' of ActNow:

One of the messages that we put out to young people, is that ... serious issues don't necessarily need to be treated solemnly. (Nicholas)

Lack of time is mentioned as a key barrier to involvement by a number of interviewees:

[I]n terms of other barriers ... they're afraid of the time commitment. (Gibbs)

Overall lack of time and energy, obviously was a [barrier]. They're either too busy or too tired. Or too busy to even learn enough to get motivated enough to do something. (Campbell Case)

Stage of life stuff. I guess that's similar to lack of time, lack of energy. Just various constraints to being active that are related to your status – of work or

family or carer commitments or your general lifestyle. (Campbell Case)

Morrell also mentions time as a barrier for many people, and speaks of how the organisation is actively trying to challenge the inward-looking nature of some people's lives:

Other barriers – obviously time poor people, who find that they're just trying to survive, do their own life. And I think that ACF also being a national organisation, it's difficult for us to be working on a really small scale community level, which is where I think a lot of people are at. And so with GreenHome, we do that. We try to initiate sort of communities of practice, and to draw people out of that sort of individual lifestyle, of go to work, go home, you know, you don't engage with a lot of people outside of that. (Morrell)

However, lack of time is obviously only a barrier to participation in certain kinds of activism. As Hepburn points out, some forms of activism are not particularly time consuming:

We do have a lot of people who will send a letter to their politician, for example, which doesn't take much time either. It's as little time to do that as it takes to fill in a form saying, yeah, I'm keen to donate 50 bucks a month. (Hepburn)

Finally, another barrier that some people may face is a lack of confidence in their own skills – this may prevent them from taking that 'first step' because, as Gibbs put it - 'they think that they need more experience'.

Overcoming barriers

Various strategies for overcoming the many different kinds of barriers that people face were discussed. For example, some interviewees suggested that challenging people's negative perceptions of activism means working to reframe the issue for them, and helping them to see that there is a very broad range of things that might be considered under the umbrella of 'activism':

So I think it's about how you define activism, and I guess in Green Home particularly, and all of ACF, we're about reducing Australia's ecological footprint. So that can be an action of setting up a community garden plot, is an extremely radical action to take because you're interacting with your community. You're engaging in something physical, you're providing for yourself outside of other mainstream economic structures and you're having a fantastic environmental outcome because you're reducing food miles and toxic food growth and things like that. Or helping your school set up a thing, so those sort of things are also action that we don't necessarily hear about every day in the newspaper. (Morrell)

It's about us being clear about the many and varied ways that people can support our work. (Campbell Case)

In addressing the 'image barrier' it can also be useful to challenge people's stereotypes about activists head-on, as Morrell points out:

Sustainability Street⁹ for example, when they start their workshops they put up an image of a really funny looking man in dreadlocks. And say when you do this workshop, this is what you'll end up looking like, so it's sort of

⁹ Sustainability Street is a neighbourhood-based training program in sustainable living. See http://www.voxbandicoot.com.au/sustainability_street.html

making fun of that idea that if you are engaged with political activism you have to conform to a stereotype. And I think that's quite important, because environmental action has moved on a lot – it really is a fundamental value in our society. As activists we also need to remember to make fun of ourselves, celebrate our successes and not be so intense all the time. (Morrell)

As an attempt to overcome the time barrier that exists for many people, many organisations appear to be looking to online strategies as one tool:

[T]he Who On Earth Cares [website-based] campaign is really targeted at people that don't want to take too much action, but want to – we make it easy for them, so if they are time poor they can still do a really good behaviour change and advocacy intervention tool. (Morrell)

(The various ways in which organisations are using online strategies is discussed in more detail below).

Gibbs talks about strategies for overcoming people's lack of confidence – the feeling that they don't have the skills to contribute. He suggests that part of the answer is in convincing people that their passion and their personal experiences (in this case, of cancer) are the most important assets they can bring:

[I]n terms of other barriers, people think ... that they need more experience'. And I think we do okay in letting people know that the biggest thing they can offer is—we'll do all the training, but passion, and one of the most valuable things they have is their story to share. (Gibbs)

The importance of social factors

In reflecting on what motivates people to be involved in activism or collective action, or to remain engaged with movements or organisations, and also in sharing ideas for the kinds of recruitment and engagement strategies that are effective, many interviewees stressed the importance of social relationships. It was felt that for many people, the social benefits that come from their involvement play an important part in keeping them engaged:

[O]ne of the things that is really noticeable when our local groups are working well is that the social relationships and the social bonds within those groups is incredibly strong. The local group will end up playing, for a lot of people, a really important role in their social world. (Hepburn)

In addition, social relationships are often critical in enabling or motivating people to get involved in the first place, to take that difficult 'first step'. This is a point made by Tattersall as she recalls her own initiation into activism:

[T]he way in which I got involved was being brought in by friends, which you always forget, you know, being mentored individually. I went to my first meeting, I was completely freaked out. And frankly, if it wasn't for my other friends around, I would have not probably come back. We forget those processes. (Tattersall)

This is an experience that Tattersall has found to be typical when she asks participants in her training sessions about their own initiation into collective action:

Through some of the organising training, we look at this question ... how did you first get involved? And actually you could almost list off how you first got involved – you were asked. There was someone who asked you, or provided an opportunity for engagement – sometimes it was parents or

family, sometimes it was a friend or a stranger, like a union organiser. But you were asked. (Tattersall)

This understanding of how people are introduced to an organization through a social connection, informs Tattersall's approach to training organisers to focus on recruiting new members through 'conversations':

We use that in training ... when we're trying to organise, going out and asking, having those conversations is critical. You know, you're not going to join an organisation through advertising. That's just not going to happen. (Tattersall)

It also informs the approach of the Inspire Foundation's ActNow program, which seeks to enable young people to build social connections and communicate with each other about the issues:

[W]e promote ActNow as an opportunity to become engaged, and to connect with other young people who care about the issues that you care about. ... [S]o an action can be just finding out about an issue and talking to your friends about it, or getting on ActNow and actually communicating about issues and action in that way. (Nicholas)

The importance of nurturing social connections, both for young people's wellbeing, but also for building participation in activism is clearly understood by the Inspire Foundation:

[T]hat's where Inspire comes from, in that we know that ... by young people getting informed and feeling empowered and taking action, it helps their mental health and wellbeing. Because they're becoming more connected to their community and they're feeling more confident in the contribution that they're making to their community, whether that's their local community or however they define their community. So ... it's all about getting informed, taking action, connecting to people who are like you and connecting to organisations and your community. (Nicholas)

Approaches to recruitment and engagement

Interviewees shared many reflections on the kinds of strategies that can be effective in recruiting people to their organisation. Tattersall for example, reflects on the kinds of mechanisms by which people join organizations, and suggests that an understanding of these processes is critical in order to 'renew' organisations:

[T]raditionally the way in which people join the union is through a combination of one to one discussion with already active union members or organisers, combined with ... participation in collective decision-making structures, and undertaking collective action. I think they're the three mechanisms by which people join. The challenge for renewing organisation is to emphasise all those three things and not just one of them. ... And I actually think if you don't do all three, you fail. (Tattersall)

Organisations reported using a range of strategies to recruit volunteers or activists to their organisation. Timothy Gibbs, of ACS stresses the importance of having 'all sorts of entry points into the organisation'. These include events, programs and support services, all of which provide different ways for people to come into contact with, and possibly volunteer for, the organisation.

Morrell suggests that, in designing their recruitment strategies, organisations need to be realistic about the place of activism in most people's lives:

I think for all age groups, they want it to be incorporated into their day to day living. I think there's only a small number of people that will take on activism as their main driving sort of modus operandum. So anything that can be incorporated into their life and that relates to them, I think is what works. (Morrell)

A number of interviewees touched on this issue of the need to understand the current reality of people's lives before expecting to recruit them to any new activity. They talked about the importance of reaching out to people at the local and personal levels, and engaging them in the places and circumstances in which they are already socialising and organising. Morrell for example, makes several comments on this issue:

GreenHome is really that outreach arm, and even the Climate Project where we have a lot of presenters that go out in the community and run presentations in sports clubs and church groups, and CEOs and doctors and things like that. (Morrell)

I mean I really do think it's about relating to people where they're at, and that's a really difficult thing because you can't go into someone's personal life and watch them all the time, and work out what their triggers are. But I just think that often we get frustrated because we want to do the big picture stuff, but you've got to really relate to the local and practical situation for people. That's what they relate to, that's what they think they can influence, and that's what they're willing to take action on. It's through this that we step into the broader advocacy asks.

... it's like with cancer, I guess. I would imagine you would be thinking – well you relate that to your family and friends, you're not going to relate it to is there enough money for research. That's not the key motivator for people in some ways. That's the knock-on effect, but how you get to people, is how it's effected in their life. (Morrell)

Tattersall also speaks about the need for organisations to make themselves relevant to people's personal experiences, meaning that they need to be able to connect to those issues that are already important in people's lives:

When we're successful – we try to connect the issues of joining – not just joining a union but being able to have control over your working life, to specific experience, their personal specific experience. Now, that's a challenge and in doing so it's both about connecting to their experience and also there being a sense that in joining the organisation, there is something that can change in their lives. (Tattersall)

For Tattersall, one of the main reasons people are engaged 'is through issues'. Consequently, this means that making organisations relevant to people's lives involves reconsidering the kinds of 'issues' that the organization frames as relevant, and the level at which these issues are pitched to people:

[For] the union movement to be relevant to people's lives needs to open the scope of issues upon which we campaign. We can't hive off wages and conditions issues in the workplace from a broader set of workplace or work related concerns, like How do I get to work? Public transport. How do I access work? Childcare. Things like that. They're work related but we can't separate those issues any more. So issue is important. (Tattersall)

[T]here are three things that I found in my PhD that are important for an issue. It needs to have a social frame. It needs to have an interest engagement with the organisation. So you know, a collective engagement. And it needs to

have a personal engagement. That issue needs to touch people sort of personally, collectively and at a social level. And if it doesn't have those three, it's probably not going to work. And I think that most of the things that the left, progressive, social change organisations do at the moment is we hit the top point well – 'Rights at Work' – beautiful. Often we can touch the individual. And we struggle with that collective narrative. (Tattersall)

Nicholas also touches on the theme of how issues are framed as an important factor in attracting young people to the organisation:

Young people basically told us that one of the biggest barriers preventing them from taking action was that they felt they didn't know enough about the issues, and that they really cared about those issues, but it was often hard to find objective information about them, and information that was written in language they understood. So, one of the core focuses of ActNow is to break down those complex issues. And young people create all the content. So we work with young people in an editorial capacity to write those issue pages in language which, I suppose, is attractive to their peers and to provide objective information. So we're all about young people coming onto the site, making up their own mind about an issue and then forming connections. ... One of our core beliefs is that we know – we believe that a lot of young people are very passionate about social issues and don't necessarily think of them as political issues or frame them in that way. But it's something that lots of young people are kind of attracted to and want to find out more about. And it's a very strong determinant to then becoming involved in their community and connecting with other young people and connecting with organisations like the Cancer Council. (Nicholas)

Similarly Campbell Case mentions engagement with a particular issue as a key motivator for some people to join Amnesty:

Some people get involved with our work because they have a desire to have an impact on a really specific cause. So some people have joined us because of our stop violence against women campaign, or our work on the death penalty for example. So if they've got a particular interest in that human rights issue and they know we're active on it, they'll join us for that reason. (Campbell Case)

As well as a focus on issues, Tattersall calls for a critical approach to the scale at which organisations engage people:

I think that we sometimes forget into what space we're trying to organise people. So we think that if we call a rally in the city, that that engages people who actually don't – who are fairly disconnected from the city. They may not work in the city, they don't come to the city, they don't care about going to a rally in the city. I think a lot of political action is focussed at a scale that it doesn't touch people. People can ignore it. ... The union movement has always been multi-scaled ... but in the same time that we've lost membership, I think we also lost that grass roots local participatory structure and space for engagement. It got drawn down to the workplace but it sort of – it became more top-down ... (Tattersall)

Tattersall cites the Rights at Work campaign, and particularly the 'local rights at work groups where people take control of organising', as an attempt to try to recreate this small or local scale participatory structure.

It is evident that an extremely wide range of specific tools are used to try to recruit people, from street canvassing, to one on one conversations, to online strategies to public events. Some of these are described in detail as examples – Morrell mentions

the use of special events as an effective way to engage people in an issue in an enjoyable and interesting way:

We also do things like ... with our marine campaign, we organised for a chef to come out from Canada who worked with sustainable fish. And so we did a function at a sustainable fish café in Melbourne, and invited a lot of members and donors and media and Melbourne's restaurant industry as well, to come and to encourage using sustainable fish. So we do a whole lot of different – yeah, that could be coined activism, getting the message out, as well as releasing a report at the same time, but to different target audiences where it will have a greater impact. But it's just hooking it onto another event. (Morrell)

Greenpeace uses its public events and actions as opportunities for recruitment:

There's also ad hoc engagement things. So we did this action on Sunday up in Newcastle. Then we sent out a special email to – not all of our list, but to a segment to our list, saying hey, we've just done this. You might have heard us on the news yesterday. Get involved in the campaign. Here's how. Take action. Click here and send an email to your MP, blah-blah-blah. Find out more information. (Hepburn)

Campbell Case mentions a new recruitment strategy that is attempting to take people on a journey, beginning with a small action:

We are actually exploring trialling a new form of activist recruitment, which is based on a field-marketing model. We will ask people to 'take action' and initiate a journey through the organisation. [B]ecause it's on the street, [the actions are] probably going to be petitions, or similar. We're hoping to equip them with PDAs so people can take action online on the spot. We'll probably then give them something to take away, like some kind of login so they can go away and have a look at our website and personalise it from there. (Campbell Case)

One interesting question that arose in the interviews was that of what difference the actual recruitment methods make to the kind of involvement that a person goes on to have with an organisation. The following exchange with Hepburn suggests that whether or not a person initiates contact themselves may be important:

Hepburn: [I]n terms of fund-raising, the people who we recruit via the web tend to stay longer and tend to give more than people who we recruit on the street.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Is that because they initiated that contact themselves, do you think?

Hepburn: I think so. Yeah. You know, if they're making the choice in the comfort of their own home, then they're making a really conscious choice. Whereas if somebody's coming up to them and asking them, then there's a level of, I think, obligation sometimes that can be implied, even just through the act of asking, regardless of how you actually ask. If you – you know, you're coming up to someone and saying, Will you support Greenpeace? Then I think some people might say yes, when they wouldn't have voluntarily made the effort to support Greenpeace without being asked.

Interviewer: Okay. So what you're finding is that, over time, those people don't tend to stay as long?

Hepburn: That's right.

Interviewer: Their attachment is not as strong?

Hepburn: Yep.

These comments suggest that while these kinds of 'stranger on the street' fundraising strategies are often seen as necessary for an organization to survive financially, they may not necessarily be effective in facilitating a deep or long-lasting engagement with or sense of attachment to the organisation.

Like Hepburn, Tattersall stresses that the actual mechanisms by which people are recruited to an organization are important in helping to determine their later level of attachment. However, while Hepburn points to the value of people making a self-initiated choice, rather than being asked, Tattersall suggests that being asked is actually critical, but that what matters is the level of proximity and trust in the person who asks you:

[T]he process, how you sign people up, is incredibly critical and there are frameworks that we use to understand that process: communication is more reliable, depending on the proximity of the relationship. You know, talking to a stranger about something ... you can dismiss it, in contrast to talking to a friend who you trust. (Tattersall)

Tattersall points to literature that suggests that 'how people join the union movement completely structures their understanding of participation in the union movement'. She cites a study by American author Kate Bronfenbrenner, to make this point:

She did a study, a comparative study of people who joined the union movement as a form of insurance and compared that to people who signed up to the union and within the first three months, participated in a campaign. ... And their perceptions of what it meant to be a union member were diametrically opposed. ... I think it was like 70 or 80 per cent of people who were signed up for unionism as insurance saw the union as insurance. Whereas those who were signed up in the process of a campaign saw the union movement as them having ownership ... and them being active agents in its future. (Tattersall)

Linked to this is the issue, also raised by Tattersall, of what 'engagement' with, or participation in an organization actually means:

[W]hat does engagement mean? A struggle for many large organisations is that engagement can be reduced to making donations ... it can be a consumer oriented way of participating rather than having building a sense of politicisation. (Tattersall)

On this issue, Campbell Case relates a finding from the focus groups that Amnesty conducted, which suggests that people are keen for donations of their time to be recognised as important by an organization:

[P]eople liked the capacity to be able to donate their time rather than money. I'm sure that works in reverse as well, but not everybody's in a position to be able to give money, or some people are a bit sceptical about how money is spent in charities. So one of the drivers to activism was that 'time support' was equally valuable. (Campbell Case)

One final issue that emerged in terms of how organisations approach recruitment and engagement is a practical one concerning the resources of the organisation. Hepburn mentions that many mass-mobilisation strategies need to be supported by

sophisticated organisational data systems, and that these can sometimes be lacking in non-profit organisations:

[G]roups in the US ... have managed to mobilise thousands and thousands of people to be out, doing phoning, holding house parties and that kind of thing. ... But in terms of the data side of that and the integrated systems that you need to run those kinds of programs effectively and manage large lists, well we're – we don't really have any role models for that, I guess. But it's not exactly rocket science. A lot of businesses do that for managing their customer base. So we're sort of looking at models within the corporate world as well, to really try and understand how we can manage our supporter relations better. (Hepburn)

The need for good quality technological tools and support, and the challenge for non-profit organisations to develop these was also mentioned by Campbell Case:

[W]e don't have one central database of our activists in Australia. So we don't have that kind of profiling information available. We're hoping to get there, but we currently don't have it. ... We've got seven regions, and we've actually been working on the development of a database for quite a few years so we should be rolling out a new database quite soon. Currently we just don't know a lot about our activists. So doing that kind of that analysis, it's a full time job and we just don't have the capacity or the systems right now. (Campbell Case)

Are there any identified characteristics or segments of people more likely to be involved?

Interviewees were quite conscious of the particular groups, or segments of the community that tend to be involved with or connected to their organisation. While most suggested that their membership was fairly diverse and there was no such thing as a 'typical member', there were nevertheless aware that certain groups were more likely to be represented among their membership. Which groups these were varied according to the organisation.

[T]his is totally anecdotally from my own experience—but I would have to say that, boy, at least a large plurality of our volunteers are middle-aged Caucasian women. And I think that has to do with—and lots of them are breast cancer survivors. (Gibbs)

Generally we have an older segmentation of our members that are attracted, so it might be professionals or people who have been with ACF for a long time. (Morrell)

I think our actual supporter base has been distorted in recent years by our primary recruitment mechanism, which is on the ground fundraising, through the frontline program, which is like a direct dialogue, street canvassing, fund-raising. The people we have had doing that have tended to be young people. They've tended to approach and resonate with and connect with other young people. So our actual financial supporter base is younger than it probably otherwise would be because of that. ... [W]e do engage a lot of young people, but we do have a lot of older people who have supported the organisation for a long time, you know from the '70s or the early '80s. (Hepburn)

[T]he people who tend to support Amnesty, are 26- 55 plus women, tertiary educated, a teacher or working in the community sector, middle income earners, live in the city... We know it to that extent. About 60% of our

supporters are female. (Campbell Case)

Many interviewees articulated a desire to broaden the base from which they recruit members, and it was common for organisations to be actively trying to broaden participation.

[W]e have the people who are currently our supporters and the people we would like to become our supporters, who are quite different. (Hepburn)

[O]ur motivation is not to necessarily attract the really highly, highly engaged young people, although we understand that they're often the people who are involved in our internship programs and were instrumental in helping us launch ActNow. But in terms of our general site members, we actually try and – we hope to kind of reach the people who care about issues, but because of all the barriers involved in taking action, often don't know where to start. So they're the kind of people that we aim to attract through targeted marketing campaigns. (Nicholas)

I think we spend a lot of time in ACF trying to make sure that we're speaking to a non-converted audience, not the initial early adopters but to go beyond that to a mainstream audience. Generally we find the most impactful way to do this is to partner with high profile, respected figure heads like Al Gore with our Climate Project and Cate Blanchett with Who On Earth Cares. Along with reactive media we also pursue alliances with broader media partners such as Home Beautiful magazine. (Morrell)

Morrell reports that her organisation has made a particular effort to broaden participation, particularly with people who may not traditionally have aligned themselves with ACF, and has done this through some innovative partnership approaches:

I think in recent years some of the more collaborative initiatives that we've undertaken, people want to show their support, so things like the business roundtable on climate change, that in 2005 forged ahead with a sector that traditionally then wasn't thinking about climate change. But through our work it put them on the map as leaders, of taking a leadership role and giving them access. Similarly our work with the Farmers Federation in establishing LandCare, was working with a non-traditionally aligned sort of group to have good environment and social outcomes from that. (Morrell)

Some other strategies mentioned that are intended to broaden participation were peer to peer recruitment and outreach in different communities:

[O]ur organisation here in California is very committed to diversity, and we are constantly doing outreach in different communities and different constituencies. I think the ethnic makeup of our ambassadors has improved vastly over the last couple of years, because we've tried very hard to make the face of our ambassadors look more like the face of California, which is a very diverse state. So I think we've been fairly successful from where we were, to where we are. I think that has to do a lot with peer to peer recruitment. It's also very important that we recruit advocates from various ethnic constituencies as well, because in California, minority communities quite often have higher rates of cancer than most, and they are the most medically underserved. That's where the cancer is, and that's where we ought to be focusing a lot of our energy on. (Gibbs)

Campbell Case suggested that the Amnesty local groups program is a model that successfully fosters a broad and diverse membership:

The 'local action groups' reflect the communities that they're in, rather than a particular Amnesty type, I think. That's because they're all so unique and are based within that context. So if they're young and fun and happening—some of them meet in a pub, some of them meet in a café, some of them meet in a church hall, some of them meet in a library. It all just really depends. I don't think that there is a typical local group member. (Campbell Case)

Another approach to broadening participation was to develop tailored programs for different audience segments:

Some of it has to do with the different programs we offer, [...] One program I'm thinking of is our Body and Soul program, which targets African American communities in terms of just general cancer control, and looking to that program to recruit more advocates. I think we've used various strategies for various places, and maybe that's something that we haven't developed, a state-wide specific strategy. But I think just having that as a priority for us has vastly improved from where we were a few years ago. Just talking about it and actually looking, and telling the volunteers we're recruiting to keep diversity in mind when they're recruiting, has been very helpful. And just bringing that up, that this is a priority for us. (Gibbs)

We have been branching out a bit into – we set up this thing called Grey Power, which is sort of partly an attempt to appeal to an older audience to get people – you know, retirees – actively involved in the organisation. It's a brand that is slightly separate to Greenpeace, but pretty similar. We've got a few Grey Power groups around Sydney that – they basically work on environment change issues. So it's partly about trying to get those folks, that – like it's quite a powerful political constituency. Trying to get them a bit more tuned onto climate change issues. Trying to broaden our appeal through our fund-raising, I guess, into that older demographic. You know, we have an ageing population, we need to deal with that. But that's been a lot of hard work and not – to this point, not a lot of – it's worked to some extent. I'm not sure how much we're going to keep on investing in that area. It's been an experiment. I don't know that we've quite got the return on our investment that we would have hoped to get. (Hepburn)

Tailored approaches can also be developed on an issue-basis:

[W]e have national networks of people, we have the national women's team or the national refugee team. Sometimes they're expert based, sometimes they're just people who are particularly interested in that area of issue. They coordinate particular areas of work or activism on particular campaigns. (Campbell Case)

Another means of broadening an organisation's appeal is to take a more 'mainstream' approach, by trying to create campaigns that appeal to a more mainstream audience, or that consciously try to make the issue relevant to a wider audience. ACF gave an online strategy as an example of a campaign that is aimed 'way beyond our existing members':

[R]ecently we launched the 'Who on earth cares' website, which has been a really interesting project, because it's aiming to reach 75-80 per cent of the population as a whole. So it's a very mainstream approach that we're taking.

It's also really clear that it's got high profile people involved like actors, footballers, comedians and singers and things. We've done a whole lot of work around launching that as I mentioned with Cate Blanchett in the media. We did a lot of interviews through mainstream media like *Sunrise* and *In the Morning* and all of those sort of things. And then we're doing a postcard

campaign – so Avant Cards – and just really using it as a sort of an umbrella tool to draw people together as the first step in our climate change campaigning. (Morrell)

However, while some organisations actively seek to engage a ‘mainstream’ audience, others are comfortable attracting people whose views and values are strongly aligned to those of the organisation:

[W]e tend to attract, and we actually would like to have, people who are – who have very strong beliefs, who have a high level of ideological alignment with the organisation. Could be younger, could be older. But generally are younger and we’re fine with that. (Hepburn)

Some groups perhaps have a slightly easier task in convincing a wide range of people about the relevance of their issue. As Gibbs points out, when it comes to the issue of cancer, so many people already have one of the critical ingredients for engagement, namely a personal connection to the issue. He notes that many ACS advocates have been caregivers to someone with cancer, or are survivors themselves. He sees the broad-based relevance of the organisation as a particular asset when it comes to recruiting a diversity of volunteers:

I think our organisation is somewhat unique, in that many political organisations have to cater to a certain constituency, and whether that’s an ideological constituency, their left wing or right wing politics, ours is very broad based. Cancer affects everyone. Of any other advocacy organisations I can think of, we are in the fortunate position to be able to recruit from a wide spectrum of volunteers. These days American politics are so fractured and so strongly divided, I would say that we would be one of the few organisations that really has a full spectrum of advocates. (Gibbs)

How and why do people move to ‘higher’ levels of activism?

A number of interviewees talked about the different ‘levels’ at which people were involved with their organisation, and the challenges of encouraging people to increase their level of activism. Just as there are barriers to joining an organisation in the first place, there are also barriers to participating in some of the more active opportunities for activism and advocacy that they offer. Gibbs suggests that both fear and lack of confidence are significant:

...[T]hey’re, quite frankly, a little bit scared of advocacy. They think, ‘I couldn’t go see my member of Congress, or my state assembly person’. It just seems like something that they haven’t been exposed to, and it’s outside their level of comfort. And what it takes to get around that is lots of training, lots of just constant exposure to advocacy and how important it is within the organisation. So it’s something that we try, even if a meeting has nothing to do with—if it’s a fundraising meeting, we try and encourage that staff or those volunteers who are running these meetings to at least mention advocacy, that it’s something that needs to be coursing through the organisation at all times. (Gibbs)

This comment suggests that there is a need for organisations to demystify advocacy and activism. Many people do not have a clear understanding of what these types of activities might involve, and this is an obvious barrier to them feeling confident that they can participate. As Gibbs reports, the ACS attempts to address this by bringing up the *idea* of advocacy in as many different contexts as possible, increasing people’s exposure to it, and presenting these kinds of activities to its members as central to the organisation.

When asked about the kinds of strategies that they use to encourage people to

become more engaged with the organisation, or to move to a 'higher' or 'deeper' level of activism, interviewees mentioned a number of interesting approaches:

Interviewer: I guess organisations try to broaden their support base, but also to deepen it. I wonder if that – just thinking about the deepening – if that's a conscious effort that you make, to try and increase the level of activism of your supporters and the number of things that they do and try to move them, say from being just receivers of information, to taking action of some kind? And if so, how you go about that?

Hepburn: Yeah. We do. We're not as systematic about that as we would like to be. Again, it's one of the areas that we are starting to invest more in and really recognising the importance of having clear engagement or development pathways for supporters. So someone might come into contact with the organisation by seeing us on the news, and they might go to our website, for example, and sign up to an e-list. And they don't really have much engagement with the organisation.

So how do we understand where those people are at and then taking them on some kind of a journey to really deepen their engagement? That's something we aspire to achieving, but we haven't really got there yet. We haven't quite got the systems in place to do that. We have them in theory, but in practice, those systems are not working as we would like them to do.

So that's an area for development. We certainly think along those lines and would like to get to the point where we have a really clear engagement plan for all of our contacts to sort of take them on a journey to deepen, broaden their engagement with the organisation – both as financial supporters and as activists. (Hepburn)

Campbell Case also reports that Amnesty is taking a similar approach, by thinking about the kinds of 'journeys' on which they might take their supporters:

[W]e've made a commitment to developing integrated supporter journeys so wherever people's entry point is, we'll try and move them through the organisation to a position where they are as involved as they want to be - in terms of activism and/or financial contribution – and feel appreciated and effective. (Campbell Case)

The activist research project that we're half way through is hopefully going to help us identify what some of those trigger points [for moving to 'higher' levels of activism] might be. We have worked out levels of engagement, starting from one off or occasional activists right through to the most active activists.. Of course we want to be able to identify the characteristics and behaviours that need to be present in order to be in one of those four levels, as well as trigger points for moving to the next level. We are working on this model right now. (Campbell Case)

In seeking to encourage higher levels of engagement however, organisations must tread a careful line, as many people will only want to commit to a 'low' level of involvement. Morrell for example, notes that while there may be a large number of people who are interested in attending a one-off event and receiving some information, there are far fewer people who volunteer to play a more active, ongoing role:

We tend to find in GreenHome, we'll run workshops with about 150 people in them, and generally those are people who know a little bit about the environment, or are interested but want to find out more. And from that we set up sort of communities of practice, so that's like your activist-y group, and generally we'll always get about six to ten people out of that 150 that will take up that option. So if that gives you a sense ... there's a group of people out there that are active, that are busy, that take responsibility for their community seriously, that want to play a leadership role or those sort of things. (Morrell)

Morrell speaks about how the organisation tries to strike a balance between helping people see the 'bigger picture' on environmental issues and also meeting them 'where they are' by responding to their focus on smaller-scale or personal actions:

Morrell: [I]n GreenHome, I mean we'll present sort of the bigger picture around the environment, so you know, how water use is linked to climate change, is linked to the economy and community concern over desalination plants, that sort of thing. We will also always have an advocacy action connected to such a topic ie. writing a letter to your superannuation fund requesting ethical investment. But it's the practical sort of things that people – the things that people can save money on, and that they see will have a purpose for themselves, that they are interested in. So it's not so much the altruistic aspirations. However this obviously plays a role because they are taking the time to consider the bigger picture. (Morrell)

Interviewer: Yeah okay, and I'm interested in whether you just meet people where they are and you help them do things in their own life, and in their own home, or whether you try to, if you like, increase their level of activism; whether you try and encourage them to do more political lobbying or activist type activities, or whether that's a different segment of your audience.

Morrell: In the organisation of ACF there's I guess different programs, so we come at things using different methods. So something like GreenHome and the 'Who on earth cares' online campaign, is very much coming at people where they're at, and then stepping them through. So it's sort of an understanding that sustainability, which is the game that we're in, is a journey. So you just meet people where they're at, and then you work with that and take them along that road.

Other areas, I guess, are a lot more traditional campaigning techniques, so around anti-nuclear for instance, where we will request and foster community action to reinforce our campaign and policy demands. Or reacting to issues that are coming up from the political agenda or from the media, where we will call on our members to support us or to write a letter or to contact their local parliamentarian.

So there's certainly work that we do in educating the community about the value of being engaged in the democratic process, and making it as easy as we can for them to do that with contact lists and sort of top five tips of how you can take advocacy action. But in terms of motivating, it's very much about also meeting people where they're at.

Most organisations, like Greenpeace, take a multi-faceted approach to this challenge, trying to mobilise a large number of people to take simple, or 'low level' actions, while also looking to engage others in a more active sense:

We're always wanting to build our lists and build our contact, our base ... there's, I guess, a few different functions there. One is education, letting people know what's going on and helping to shift public opinion in a wider sense. One is trying to get people engaged at a fairly low level. So we can send out a note saying hey, you know, Goodman Fielder are using genetically engineered ingredients in their margarine. Contact them and tell them to stop doing it. Then we can hopefully get 10,000 people within a week to bombard the company's phone lines and inbox and so on. So they shift their policy. So that's an important part of us actually achieving our campaign objective. Being able to mobilise a large number of people to a relatively low level. Then the other sort of more active engagement is then helping to inspire people to get involved in civil disobedience, particularly on climate change. We see that as a really important part of the strategy for achieving change. (Hepburn)

The approach taken by the Inspire Foundation is to encourage a range of levels of participation by encouraging the young people who it engages to take a very broad view of what constitutes 'action'. Nicholas talks about the careful way in which 'taking action' is framed on the ActNow website so as to include many different forms:

The actions [profiled on the website] are kind of broad and diverse, so anything from kind of, I suppose, more traditional forms of taking action. So letter writing, petitions, attending events, attending talks, to more creative expressions of action, so making multimedia, raising awareness through ... street performances. ... [T]he whole idea is that actions are taken every day by lots of different people. And they can be traditional, but they can also be unique and you can actually be a participant or a creator of action. ... So we recognise that the traditional forms of taking action are definitely valid, but not necessarily something that all young people want to do. ... [A]lso recognising that just getting on a site like ActNow and reading about an issue that you've heard about, is actually a form of taking action because you're becoming more informed. And then obviously more confident to express your opinion, and to talk to other people about that as well. So the idea is that action doesn't necessarily have to be this big expansive thing that takes months to plan and kind of execute, but it can just be as simple as finding out more and talking to somebody. And becoming better informed yourself. (Nicholas)

Similarly, Campbell Case talks about the importance of providing people with a range of ways to be involved, and recognising the range of contributions that people make, rather than conceiving of 'members' in a narrow sense:

We also have many different ways that you can be involved. So you can actually be a member, and you have access to voting rights and governance, or an activist, or a financial contributor or any combination of the three. (Campbell Case)

One factor that Gibbs suggests is important in enabling people to move to 'higher' or more active types of activism is their level of familiarity with the organisation. He reports that for ACS, most of the people who are at the more 'activist' end of the spectrum are those who have been involved with the organisation for some time as volunteers, and have developed a level of familiarity with it and confidence in their ability to work within it:

For the most part, our volunteers have already been active in the organisation for a little bit by the time they become political activists [...] because it's kind of an educational process for them to feel comfortable as far as advocating on behalf of the American Cancer Society. (Gibbs)

Based on this understanding, when ACS looks to recruit people to its activist and advocacy activities, the organisation actively targets those people who already have a level of familiarity with the organisation:

We have all these various programs throughout the organisation where we're recruiting volunteers in all these different entry points [...] Usually after they're familiar with the organisation, we try and recruit what are called legislative ambassadors. They're our top-tier grassroots volunteers. (Gibbs)

Hepburn mentions one communication strategy that Greenpeace uses to try to move people to a deeper level of engagement with the organization by broadening the number of issues they are interested in:

We have a large newsletter list, which is a general newsletter list, which is probably our largest regular communication that goes out. ... [W]e have migrated people who were just interested in whales, for example, onto that list, hoping to get them more engaged in climate change and other issues that we care about. So we do try to move people from just single issue interests to having a broader engagement with the organisation. We see that that's a better way to sustain long term engagement with those people. (Hepburn)

Nicholas mentions a series of 'toolkits' that are available on the ActNow website that are designed to help structure young people's engagement, and help them move towards taking action:

We structure action around a process which involves creating a vision for the world, planning your action, acting and then reflecting.¹⁰ The idea is that action becomes a cyclical process, in which you always reflect back on an action and share your experiences with other people. ... Nicholas)

Another factor that was mentioned as helping people move towards more higher levels of activism was the confidence that comes from 'learning by doing'. Nicholas provides a good example of how this works for the young people who use the ActNow website:

Interviewer: What do you think it is that causes someone to move from maybe joining in the discussions [on the ActNow website] to actually taking more action?

Nicholas: I think it's having confidence in your vision. ... [I]t's really hard to start taking action, and there's lots of barriers and lots of stereotypes ... which is stuff like oh it's not going to make a difference, what can I do, and all those questions around agency.

[F]rom the young people who have been involved in our youth participation programs, it's about starting and doing something little. And understanding that even though you might have set out to go in one direction, and you ended up in another direction, that you learn valuable things along the way and that there's a feeling that you've contributed ... you learnt a lot about yourself, so the next time you set out and do something, you're

¹⁰ Nicholas wishes to acknowledge that this process was developed in conjunction with Trent McCarthy & Associates.

going to be more effective. So I think it's actually having some successes, and having those recognised as a valuable contribution within a supportive environment. [O]ne thing we do is try and get members to write action reflection stories, to actually reflect on the process of taking action and what the benefits were and the barriers. And how they overcame them, and trying to promote those kind of things as well. And understanding that just to be successful, doesn't necessarily have to mean that you achieve exactly what you set out to do. So I think for a lot of those people, it's about having that little taste of success, or having that recognised, or having that recognition, that what they're doing is valuable. (Nicholas)

In order to have the opportunity to help people move to 'higher' levels of activism, and organisation first needs to retain its members, and maintain their interest in and engagement with the organisation. The question of how to do this is discussed in the next section.

Effective organising models and strategies for sustaining people's involvement

Recruiting and engaging people to become involved with an organisation is only the first step in really building a sustainable movement, or community of activists or advocates. Beyond this, organisations need to have longer-term strategies for sustaining people's engagement.

One of the approaches that a number of interviewees talked about as characterising successful organising in the long term was the establishment of some kind of multi-level, decentralised structure. Whether these were referred to as grassroots, local groups, or opportunities for 'bottom-up' organising, they provide some kind of opportunity for people to become involved and participate in the organisation, or the movement, at a 'local' level. As Tattersall put it:

Because it's only at the local scale that people live and work. People don't live in macro Sydney. They experience Sydney when they read the newspaper but their actual lived experience and the things that matter to them are local. ... And look, it's not about romanticising the local, because you only have power if you can then harness the things that are local to a more central scale where the political power resides or economic power resides. But if it doesn't come from the bottom up, I think it's just bluffing. (Tattersall)

Similarly Campbell Case identifies the local/action group structure of Amnesty as a key to the success of attracting people to the organisation:

Another key motivator or driver to activism that we've found for us is that we have that real grassroots presence. We have groups, Amnesty groups, all throughout the country and communities. So people being able to be involved in a local group was one of the reasons that they joined Amnesty because I don't think a lot of NGOs have such an extensive grassroots community-based structure. (Campbell Case)

When asked why she thinks people are attracted to a local group structure, Campbell Case makes a similar connection between 'global' and local issues as Tattersall:

I don't know specifically, but I think it would be about them being able to have local relevance for the work that we do. So although we might be campaigning on really big issues in other parts of the world, the fact that in their community they can make it relevant and speak to decision makers in

their community and people in their community, probably is a big part of it. They like to be visible, they can see the direct kind of impact of the work that they do in their own environment or in their own context. (Campbell Case)

ACS also uses a decentralised local group model, with 'legislative ambassadors' divided up into 53 teams, according to the 53 members of Congress who represent California. Each team has a volunteer leader, and a number of other members with specified roles. This means that people can become involved with a group in their own district, and those groups can hold face-to-face meetings more easily because they are geographically based. They can also work on local policy issues. Gibbs indicates that ACS is increasingly embracing a model whereby responsibility for organising is devolved to these district-based groups.

Gibbs: I mentioned there are 53 different district teams. We're trying to get them to have meetings more often, and develop different advocacy plans and different goals for that particular team. So they're going to meet more often, and because they're geographically much closer.

Interviewer: And so trying to get them to have meetings means getting them to initiate it themselves and run it themselves, and so on, without the support of a staff member from you? Is that right?

Gibbs: Right. We're having pretty decent success. Even just last year, our meetings, and the meetings with elected officials, were very—they were set up by staff. And we're kind of getting to the point where we're able to have the volunteers take on the tasks of setting up the meeting and running the meetings themselves, and just reporting back to us how it went.

While many of the local groups mentioned appear to have a level of independence in the way they operate, it seems common that the provision of some kind of support structure by the larger organisation is necessary to sustain these kinds of groups. Amnesty's action groups for example, have a 'community campaigner' in each region:

[T]he community campaigner is the person who trains, supervises, mentors, manages, develops the relationships with those community based activists. It's a paid full time position. (Campbell Case)

Similarly, Hepburn speaks of how Greenpeace's local groups are quite independent, but can draw on the support of a coordinator:

Local groups basically are self-sustaining communities. We have a local groups coordinator that does support work for them. But they tend to be quite relatively tight-knit little social networks. (Hepburn)

However, investing in support structure and processes for decentralised groups appears to be highly beneficial for the larger organisation, as independently active groups are an incredibly positive asset for the organisation. Gibbs gives an example of this, when he reports that ACS's decentralised structure is helping the organisation to be more responsive and effective in its campaigning. Reporting on the need to muster a quick response when political circumstances changed in a recent legislative campaign, Gibbs says:

[W]e had an emergency conference call. We developed pretty specific instructions with the volunteers on how to organise these meetings, and all in about a week and a half, what we were able to get, is 16 different in-district

meetings, which is pretty much the most successful that we've ever been at that in such a short period of time.

Rather than, usually if we're going to do in-district meetings like that, it's a few months of planning and very staff-intensive. This was completely volunteer-driven. Once we released the instructions, they set to it and it worked out really well. (Gibbs)

These kinds of approaches to engaging and organising people by focusing on a decentralised structure that connects people at a local level, are examples of organisations trying to rebuild the kinds of participatory structures that Tattersall refers to as having been lost:

Tattersall: I think that that multi-scaled structures are incredibly important and yes, I guess that's what we've lost. I think that that is the challenge of rebuilding progressive organisation, is rebuilding participatory structures. Because that's what was built in the 1890s, that spread through 50 years of what you now call Keynesianism, that hasn't been there for 30 years and we don't know why.

Interviewer: Yes. Collective opportunities at the lowest kind of scale?

Tattersall: Exactly. I would call it quantum politics, the micro politics that we don't have.

As well as needing to support its 'local' groups, an organisation needs to transfer skills and build capacity. Tattersall argues strongly that effective organising requires specific skills. She sees training people in the skills of organising and building participatory structures as key:

[organising in the union movement] requires a program of skills that need to be transferred to organisers, to delegates, to activists and, the only way to spread this capacity is to spread skills. Its also about knowledge, behaviour and politicisation, but spreading it requires a program of training.. Skills like, how do you facilitate a meeting? There are too many organisations that run meetings by having a person up the front, with a few reports made and everyone is encouraged to be passive and the only way in which debate can happen is through an adversarial system where people are for and against a motion. ... [T]hat is not the way to build a movement. The way to build a movement is through a much more collective process, less rigid rules, much more open structure. To run a meeting it's about training people to have the skills to be able to facilitate a meeting in an effective way. That, is one of the biggest challenges that we face when we look at, well what's the future of say the 'Rights at Work' campaign or how do we maintain and expand locally scaled organising. What are the skills that are required to facilitate it? (Tattersall)

At Amnesty, while the staff positions of 'community campaigner' currently provide support to action groups in their region, a recognition of the need for additional support has recently led to the establishment of a new (trial) strategy for supporting, training and resourcing activists:

We're also going to conduct a field worker trial in 2008 ... and those field workers will be out in the community so they'll ... support the community campaigner. Because the community campaigner just has such a massive job – providing that face to face, one on one personal contact with regional action groups is very difficult for them. So the field workers will be the ones who go out and visit the groups to give a hand to groups who might be struggling, or

to help new groups establish. To provide training on our key campaigns to action groups, so that they can confidently campaign in their local communities, and also to establish new groups in areas where there's interest but there isn't the experience or knowledge to get an Amnesty group up and running. (Campbell Case)

Having only amalgamated its state-based arms into a national organisation relatively recently, Amnesty is also planning to recruit a new position of 'national activist training coordinator' to develop a structured training and development program for activists around the country:

[T]hat will be their job to first of all do an audit of all the types of training and development that exist in the seven regions, and then to work out some recommendations for what a national activist training and development program might look like. (Campbell Case)

Other interviewees also pointed to ways in which they provide specific training to their advocates, or activists. Speaking of ACS' 'legislative ambassadors' for example, Gibbs says:

These are the people who are trained to be advocates. We have spent considerable resources training them, giving them media training, giving them not only training, but giving them confidence to go meet with elected officials. (Gibbs)

In addition to this, in each of the ACS district groups, one person is assigned to be the 'district lead' and this person 'has a little bit more training'. (Gibbs)

Gibbs argued that taking a peer-based approach to training was particularly important. Similarly, at Greenpeace, local group members organise activist training for others:

In terms of being involved in campaigns, our local groups tend to – they do quite a lot of training in non-violent direct action. (Hepburn)

Hepburn points to the US, for some inspiring examples of how effective training can be in mobilising large numbers of people:

There's some other groups in the US that are very good at running training programs, particularly some of the campaigns that have been run around the elections in the US. The way they have managed to mobilise thousands and thousands of people to be out, doing phoning, holding house parties and that kind of thing. There's some, I think, really inspiring examples of how to do that sort of engagement really well. (Hepburn)

However, while training is important, just giving people the opportunity to 'have a go' at advocacy or activism, and to 'learn by doing' is perhaps as important as formal training program:

I would say the trainings are extremely important, but actually getting them to a meeting, getting them to meet their locally elected officials, the more times they do it, the better off they are. Sometimes we've just got to—even if they may not feel as if they're properly trained—schedule those meetings and get them in there to meet their elected officials. It's really one of those things that you're not really comfortable doing until you've actually done it. (Gibbs)

Other factors that interviewees mention as being important in sustaining people's involvement include actively acknowledging their support:

[W]e have various functions for them. So it might be things like if we have

major donors or donors, we'll put on an event to say thank you to them. (Morrell)

[W]e'll occasionally run different kind of loyalty and retention programs with – like we've got a 30 year anniversary coming up. So we're doing stuff with people who've been supporters for five years or more, for example, will receive a particular communication package from us and a big thank you for being such loyal supporters. (Hepburn)

Obviously what's really important though is that we equally recognise that giving time is as valid as giving money and vice versa. So ultimately, of course, we'd love everybody to be really active and also to give us money, but we need to recognise that people have different motivations for being involved at different capacities at different times. We want to have an enjoyable, respectful and acknowledging relationship with them. We want to be able to acknowledge that what they do is perfect, you know. So if it's someone who only wants to log on once a month and do one email action, that is great, we really welcome that. If it's somebody who wants to join a local group and be an online activist and be a human rights defender and give us \$50 a months, that's perfect as well. (Campbell Case)

Lastly, just as social factors, and specifically the building of personal relationships are critical to the recruitment of activists and advocates, so they are key to maintaining their involvement and engagement over time, as Hepburn suggests:

You know, there's a few studies that have been done, looking at social movements around the world and looking at long term activism and what sustains people and enables them to keep on being active for a long period of time. One of the things that keeps on coming up from those is that it's the social relationships. It's being part of a community of action, where people really support, nurture and inspire each other to continue being active. That's often far more important than whether or not you feel like you're being effective or a range of other things that you might think would motivate people to continue. (Hepburn)

Approaches to communicating with members

Communicating effectively with members was seen to be critically important by all interviewees:

I think that's all part of it, though, is keeping them always informed and making them feel part of it, part of—you know, this isn't just staff sitting on top of a hill dictating. I mean, if they have the sense that we're all in this together, I just can't overstate what a difference that makes. (Gibbs)

However, not all kinds of communication that organisations currently use are seen as effective. Tattersall suggests that because organisations still underestimate how difficult it is for people to get involved with an organisation for the first time, many organisations' methods for engaging new members are ineffective:

I also think that movements struggle with setting up a process for even corresponding in a meaningful way with people when they do join. Getting a letter or asking for a donation or coming to a central meeting – its not enough. (Tattersall)

A number of comments were made about what does characterise effective communication. Tattersall for example, feels that for large organizations to communicate effectively with their members requires an ability to decentralise the channels of communication, in order to communicate with people at a meaningful

scale:

Tattersall: I think that if you actually want to engage a membership, you need to be able to have a multi-scaled structure. So if you're a national organisation or a state-based organisation, you need to be able to work out a way that some of your communication can be one on one. So do you need to create districts that have organisers that facilitate groups that are local ...

Facilitator: So you have to bring the scale down...?

Tattersall: You have to bring it down. I just think that you can't do it any other way. ... Because it's those locally scaled spaces that actually allow you to have a conversation where your movement or your issue can resonate across a local community.

Amnesty perhaps provides an example of this kind of scaled-down communication. In each region, a paid staff member, known as the 'community campaigner', communicates regularly with the action groups in their region:

[T]hey'll send out an e-newsletter or a physical newsletter or a branch newsletter or some other form of communication every week or every fortnight to all of the activists in their region. Which points them in the direction of what's happening, if there's any good news or any updates, what actions they should be focussing on in that period. (Campbell Case)

Another approach to communication is to tailor communications on an issues-basis. Like many organisations, Greenpeace uses tailored emailing to its supporters:

Interviewer: So you can sort of tailor the notice that you send out to particular segments of your audience? Through the email lists that you have?

Hepburn: Yeah. We have quite a sophisticated database that we can tailor our communications to people, based on a whole range of different characteristics or previous engagement or whatever.

Morrell suggests that one important aspect of communicating with members should be to demonstrate what the organisation is doing. As an example, she feels that high-profile public events not only attract people to participate, but also provide evidence of the organisation's effectiveness when they are communicated to members:

So things like [public events and campaigns], that we can encourage our members to get involved in, something like the Climate Project with Al Gore. For them, having information about that ... is a really inspiring option for them to see that we are doing things and there's quite tangible outcomes. (Morrell)

Various methods of communicating with existing members were reported. Use of electronic methods as the main form of communication with members was common. For example, ACS reports using electronic communication as opposed to paper mailing almost exclusively, saying 'it's just too expensive to send mail out'. Similarly Hepburn reports that while Greenpeace uses other methods to communicate with its members who are not online, electronic communication is really the organisation's preference:

It's just so much cheaper. Some segments of our supporters, they don't – they're not really online people. So we don't have email addresses for them. We communicate to them via post and telephone. That works for them. It's – ideally we want to communicate with a lot more people online because it's

cheaper. (Hepburn)

Morrell suggests online communication is particularly attractive to young people, but less so for older people:

[W]hat we've found is that young people respond when we do online stuff but our older members don't really use that side of things. ... the older generation don't want to do it, they want the other way. But then we have members that are very sensitive to wasting environmental resources, so our preference is for a combination of online methods with mailouts where absolutely necessary. (Morrell)

Many organisations report using a combination of electronic and hard-copy communications:

[T]he main methods that we use are things like online newsletters, a printed journal, our website ... EarthVoice, who are financial supporters, they receive Habitat [printed ACF journal] four times a year and e-mail – they can get e-mail updates if they opt to do that ... Sometimes it's on issue basis, like reacting to an issue. Other times it's sort of a news bulletin. (Morrell)

[W]e have regular supporter communications that go out. There's a thing called 'Making Waves', which is a print newsletter. Goes out three times a year to financial supporters. We have a monthly [electronic] newsletter. We've got a couple of issue specific newsletters. So one on climate change, called 'Switched On', and another one called the 'True Food Network', which is really part of our genetic engineering campaign. So then people get regular updates, through those lists, those email lists. Then some people will get the print version as well, of Making Waves. (Hepburn)

Another method of communicating with members that was mentioned was the use of the telephone. Tattersall mentioned the use of the phone and 'ring arounds' as an effective alternative to mail outs. ACS uses various sophisticated communication methods based on the telephone. For example, it holds a quarterly conference call with around 300 'ambassadors' on the line simultaneously. This is described as being 'like a shareholder call, so people have to get in queue to ask questions' (Gibbs).

Strategies for facilitating member-to-member communication

Interviewees were also asked about methods they use to enable members to communicate with each other. For many, it seemed that less attention had traditionally been paid to this question than to the question of how the 'central' organisation communicates with its members. However, many organisations, like Greenpeace, are beginning to explore how they can provide opportunities to increase peer-to-peer communication between their members:

But in a broader sense [apart from the local groups], we don't provide opportunities for supporters to contact other supporters or to really actively engage in the Greenpeace community. We're looking at different ways of doing that. We'll probably start to move more in that direction over the next year or so. (Hepburn)

Face-to-face meetings are seen as important in increasing communication between members. ACS holds 'a yearly grassroots meeting amongst all the ambassadors where they get to get together'. This is in addition to the more regular meetings held by the district teams at a local level. The Inspire Foundation has an interesting model – it also holds face to face meetings, which it combines with an online discussion forum:

For our youth advisory board we have a 12 week online forum, where members basically participate in discussions ... and we do a series of questions and they kind of respond and give us advice and feedback, and then we bring them together for a three day workshop in the middle. So in that respect, we do have face to face opportunities for those people to connect. (Nicholas)

Morrell suggests that organised functions are an effective way for members to meet each other:

[T]he functions as I mentioned before. So if we hold like, soon we're going to be having something for just members to come, like a fun night, where we'll have some bands performing and it's like a celebration. And within that we can promote some of the work we're doing, like 'Who on Earth Cares', and how people can play a role in the upcoming election. So yeah, that's one way [for members to communicate or meet with each other] (Morrell)

Some organisations report exploring the use of online functions that allow members to communicate with each other, with mixed results:

[O]n our online website, we have a section where they can post things, but it's not really used at the moment and so we're looking at how we can increase that traffic. So we're just sort of looking at the whole website thing, as I guess everyone is. (Morrell)

Greenpeace is currently looking to online communication technologies as a way of improving the way it organises its members and supporters and connects them to each other:

[W]e're actually in the process of changing our local group program ... we don't have local groups all over the country. They tend to be relatively tightly managed. They're in capital cities. There aren't – people can't start their own local group. We would decide we're going to set up a local group and then we'd go through our records and find all the people who've contacted us, over the last year or two years or something, from that area. We'd write to them all, write to all our supporters in that area, and say hey we want to start a local action group ... do you want to come along and get involved? But we're changing the way we do that. Because we sort of realised that it's relatively high overhead. And it doesn't enable people to get actively involved all over the country. So particularly with new developments in online communication technologies, I think we can organise far more people, far more effectively, in a much more inspiring way than we have previously. We're in the process of making that shift at the moment. (Hepburn)

Campbell Case shares the view that online strategies are effective for breaking down geographical barriers and linking up the organisation's members:

Building online communities for us is really important because we have activists all over the country and currently we don't have many, or any, really effective ways of linking them up and allowing them to share their own experiences and stories and to celebrate their successes and that kind of thing. (Campbell Case)

[I]n terms of building online communities and putting people in touch with one another and being able to manage your own account and look at your own history and compare that with others, I think online is definitely a brilliant way of doing that stuff. (Campbell Case)

As some of these comments suggest, many organisations are still exploring the many

and various ways in which they might make use of online tools and other forms of information communication technology. Communication with or between members is only one use of such tools – the other use in which many people are interested is for the purposes of e-activism, or campaigning and lobbying. This issue is discussed in more detail in the following section.

The emergence of e-activism as a campaigning tool

The issue of online or e-activism was specifically explored with interviewees, and a range of responses were received. All organisations were already using information communication technologies in some way, whether by using email to contact their members, or developing website-based campaigns, or facilitating e-activism (such as email or online petitions or letters). Many suggested that information communication technology tools were an area of increasing interest. Morrell for example, sees a lot of positive potential in e-activist and online strategies, and while ACF is 'only just starting to explore them', she reports that 'that really is the direction that we're interested in going in'. Similarly Hepburn thinks that 'Greenpeace, in recent years, has significantly underinvested in online tools' and that the organization is 'starting to invest significantly more in that now'.

Interviewees were clearly taking a keen interest in the emerging opportunities for e-activism, and many were 'testing the waters' with strategies of various kinds. However, the general feeling was that it was too early to tell what the real potential of online strategies might be:

[The online action centre has only been developed really recently ...we're still establishing all of the functionality. ... [W]e can't really do any trends analysis until we've been using it—until we've got about six months worth of proper data. ... It's very early days. In terms of our strategic activism and activism growth, we're right at the beginning of that process. (Campbell Case)

Many interviewees felt that online strategies were beneficial to the world of activism, particularly because they offer new organising tools and models, but they also saw a number of limitations. Hepburn and Gibbs are typical of this view:

I think, in terms of online engagement, probably – I mean we've been looking, for quite a while, at the work that MoveOn and True Majority have been doing in the US. And GetUp was really set up here, based on that kind of organising model. So we're looking at the stuff that they do, in terms of online engagement, which has been really quite effective. I think GetUp probably does online organising and engaging better than anyone else in Australia. There's, I think, some limitations with the work that they do, that they're sort of starting to understand and improve on. (Hepburn)

I would say it's [e-activism] very useful, but it has its limitations for sure. (Gibbs)

Like electronic communication with members, one of the obvious attractions of e-activism is that it is a cheap and relatively easy means of engaging a large number of people in some form of tangible 'action', as the example described by Campbell Case shows:

[W]hat we can do is set up pre-filled in email fields so you can go into the online action centre and you can say, I want to take this action and it's an email to, say, the President of China, and the form-letter or email is already written so you can just send it off. So it's really quick and easy. Or you can use the information to adapt and write your own letter or email online ...

[b]ut in terms of getting people just to do stuff, if it's really quick and easy, they're more inclined to do it. (Campbell Case)

Campbell Case makes the point that online tools can be useful for enabling people to take action as individuals, and in this sense they have the potential to broaden the base of people who are 'active':

Online is also a really good way of engaging individual activists - so people who are never going to be group-based. People who are never going to want to go down the hall one Wednesday night a month to sign letters. With our original model of activism which is very action group focussed, it meant that people who wanted to be active for us but couldn't fit into our existing structures went elsewhere. So online activism is definitely a way of nurturing relationships with individuals whose preferences for being active are equally as valid as anybody else's. (Campbell Case)

Even if the response rate to e-activism 'calls to action' is usually quite low, as a means of getting a point of view across to decision-makers it can still have a significant impact, as Gibbs points out:

[W]e do it so often, because we're able to do it very cheaply, and seeing that our list is so big, we can get 100 emails into the legislature in an afternoon. So that's why we do it. (Gibbs)

However, Hepburn some interviewees were more cautious about the usefulness of e-activism, or at least called for some critical thinking about how and in what contexts it can be effective:

In terms of the way we use online campaigning for our normal supporter base, we have cyber actions where people can send an email to a company that's doing something dodgy. Or they can send an email to a politician, encouraging them to support the Kyoto protocol, for example, or some other thing. We tend to - our response rates for those are reasonably consistent with industry standards, I guess, from what we can understand.

Depending on the target we're trying to influence, they can have more or less effect. Most politicians - you know, getting an email from their constituents, it's really water off a duck's back. They don't really care unless they're getting thousands and thousands and thousands of them, you know. Because if you run a campaign to try and email John Howard to stop him going to war in Iraq. You know, you can have half a million people marching on the street and he doesn't really give a shit. So he's not particularly going to care if he gets 10,000 emails from people.

But if you're talking about a small company that doesn't have much of a public profile, they just happen to be investing in genetically engineered foods or they're investing in - or they're doing some dodgy toxic pollution thing. If a company like that gets a few hundred emails or letters then that can really upset them quite a lot and encourage them to change.

... We factor all that sort of stuff in when we figure out how to use the web. We really need to understand who our target is, what motivates them, what do they care about. Then we try and figure out what we need to do to try and influence them. If we decide that getting lots of emails or letters from our supporters, from the public, is going to help, then we'll use the web to try and achieve that. (Hepburn).

Campbell Case is similarly unsure about the impact of e-activism on political decision-makers:

I think in terms of the actual effectiveness of the technique, so whether or not the President of China is going to read an email petition, I don't know. That's yet to be seen. I think that's yet to be seen in the activism world generally, the effectiveness of online activism. (Campbell Case)

While Gibbs shares some of Hepburn's and Campbell Case's scepticism about the degree to which politicians take notice of emails, he nevertheless thinks it is a valuable tool:

- Facilitator: And is the political response to that kind of [e-activism] campaign such that, is it positive enough that you think it's worth continuing?
- Gibbs: Definitely. It's another communication to legislators, and there's varying opinions on what's the most valuable. It wouldn't surprise me if an email communication was the least valuable, but at the same time, it's still somebody's in that legislative office and they have to put a check down that somebody called and supported this issue, or somebody's emailed and supported that issue. And if you have 100 people in an afternoon who email in support of an issue, that legislator's going to take notice. (Gibbs)

Campbell Case cites a specific example of the kind of political impact that e-activism can have:

We have got some evidence of it working. When we were campaigning to bring David Hicks home, we had an email campaign which was to email the Prime Minister and we got over 30,000 emails and they shut down the system. They shut down the address and didn't let any more arrive. So that's an indication to us that at least they were aware of it and they weren't happy with it, so they stopped us being able to do that. ... it's an indication that they're paying attention. (Campbell Case)

However, Campbell Case makes it very clear that for Amnesty, the decision to adopt particular strategies is driven by the organisation's views about how effective those strategies are likely to be, rather than by a desire simply to adopt more online strategies (for example) because they are relatively cheap and easy. This means that online methods are not seen as any kind of simple 'answer' for the future:

- Interviewer: Does the organisation see this kind of online strategy as the way of the future, that it's going to replace some of the older methods?
- Campbell Case: No, absolutely not. Sorry, yes it's the way of the future, but no, not to replace. We're really committed to providing a diverse mix of activism options, not just so that we appeal to a broad range of people, but so that we maintain effectiveness. And

we're not convinced that online activism is the most effective activism.

What we are convinced about is that it's a really good tool for building relationships and maintaining relationships with people and for bringing in a whole new kind of set of people I suppose, or a segment of people. Or bringing in people who otherwise wouldn't necessarily be supporters of Amnesty.

But in terms of it replacing other forms of activism, it would always be the right mix. We have two staff positions called Activism Coordinators and it's their job to provide the mobilisation strategies ... they are the ones that look at what we want to achieve with campaigns and determine the right activism tools and techniques to be using. So we'd never only do online.

A number of the interviewees talk about online tools in this slightly cautious way. They definitely see them as positive, and recognise that they are extremely useful for achieving certain objectives – particularly connecting members. However they also seek to put these approaches in perspective, because they view 'real world' actions as critical.

I think you need to be realistic about how change happens. I think armchair activism, via the computer, is not – it's got a role to play. But I think it's not – we aren't going to become a virtual organisation any time soon. Even if you look at the organisations that really have used online communications very well in the US and here, with GetUp in Australia, they still do real world, on the ground stuff. They take out billboards. They do activities and actions that involve real people going to real places to put pressure on power holders in the real world. And I think that's – you know, power still resides on the streets in some ways. (Hepburn)

[T]here just needs to be a good integration between your online and offline communications. That's the trick.' (Hepburn)

I'm not one of those people who thinks that the internet is going to save us. But I do think that if the thing we need to do is to enable people to have more conversations, this can be facilitated by the web – it can help create horizontal communication, such as 'Meet-up' technology or your 'Get together' technology where people can organise themselves is useful. (Tattersall)

Tattersall also questions how meaningful e-activism is as a form of engagement on its own:

But do those people actually really deeply engage or is signing up the extent of their participation? (Tattersall)

On this point, evidence about how effective online strategies can be to recruit people into *offline* activism was inconclusive. Gibbs for one, suggested that this can be challenging:

Sometimes we would like to recruit more ambassadors out of the ranks of our e-advocacy network, and I don't know how successful we've been at that. Most of our ambassadors come from other places. But it seems like the logical place to recruit to us, but I don't know if we've every pulled that off as successfully as we would have like to. (Gibbs)

However, it is interesting to note that ACS is having some success using

sophisticated telephone-based advocacy strategies with its e-advocates:

[W]e use our e-advocacy too in some other ways, to generate phone calls sometimes. In a couple of weeks, around that campaign I was telling you about ... we are going to get a 1800 phone number where people can call in and tell where they live, you know, call a toll-free number and then we transfer directly to their elected official. So that's going to be right before the final vote, before it goes to the governor's desk.

[S]omething that we're doing right now—and this is slightly expensive, so it's pretty cost-prohibitive for us to do this more than once a year—but we're going through that whole action network list and actually calling those people. We have a calling centre in an office ... and they're calling these e-advocates and asking them to call their elected officials, or their state legislators here in California.

So far, the transfer rate's been pretty good. That's been around almost a third of the people who've been called have agreed to be transferred into the assembly offices at the Capital in Sacramento. (Gibbs)

Does e-activism broaden participation?

Whether or not e-activism is effective as campaigning tools that will achieve policy change is one question, however another potentially useful role that online strategies might play is to broaden the base of people who are active, by appealing to a wider range of people than some of the more 'traditional' tools of engagement.

But are online methods actually broadening participation? The answer is not clear. Some interviewees felt that online tools can be an effective way of attracting new people, or appealing to a more 'mainstream' audience, or to people who wouldn't become engaged in other ways. ACS e-advocates for example, are recruited at a wide range of events:

At our events, like Relay for Life—and another big event we have is called Making Strides Against Breast Cancer—and there's usually about 10,000 people at each one of those events. There's three of them in California. We'll have people fill out a petition, or tell their story about cancer, and that's when they also sign up to be an e-advocate. (Gibbs)

However, others felt that more often, these kinds of online tools were being used by people who are already active in other ways:

Well, the people who generally write the letters and do all the other things, and send the emails or make the phone calls are the people who are already highly engaged with [the ACS]—lots of them are already ambassadors. When I go check the names of the people who have answered the email, I'm like, 'Boy, I know that person, I know that person, I know that person.' So it's not strangers who do the most amount of work, that's for sure. (Gibbs)

[The people who get involved in are often people who've participated in something else before. I don't think that the internet overcomes all the barriers to participation, such as nervousness and confidence. You still need that one to one mentorship out there, having someone bringing you into a political space is what's often needed first. So I think that if we want to grow organisation, we need to be able to have people who can bring people into a political space. (Tattersall)

I think e-activism is a vehicle for deepening participation than widening participation. (Tattersall)

It seems then, that electronic tools are seen to be useful for deepening the engagement of existing members or supporters, but that recruiting people in the first place relies on real-world, personal relationships:

[S]omeone needs to bring you into political space. And then once you're in a political space, I think that the electronic communication can be really useful. ... But I also think that face to face communication is more valuable than anything else. (Tattersall)

Examples of online campaign strategies

There are many examples of the use of online and electronic tools for campaigning purposes. A small number that were mentioned by interviewees are described below to provide a flavour of the various current approaches and interviewees views about what they aim to achieve. Further information on the individual initiatives can be found by following the links provided in the footnotes.

- **Who on Earth Cares (ACF)**

Morrell describes a new online initiative of ACF, called Who On Earth Cares¹¹, and talks about what she thinks such an approach achieves in terms of taking people through the steps from concern to advocacy, and helping them to see themselves as part of a collective action:

The first screen is a map of Australia and you can place yourself on that map and say why you care about climate change ... And then the second page takes you to you sort of giving some details about yourself, then you write why you care about climate change in more detail. And the third screen you select what things you're going to do in your own life to reduce your impact on climate change, and that goes to a calculator which shows sort of the mass of people reducing greenhouse gas emissions and equivalent cars off the road. And finally what it turns into is a letter that you can then print off and send to your political representative, and on there it comes up with who your representative is and that address.

So in itself its a bit of a behaviour change tool, because it's taking people through the steps of concern about an issue doing something in their own lives. And then taking an advocacy action as well as seeing themselves as part of a bigger community, as part of – they're visually represented. As well as coming right down to that – you can place yourself on the map right down to your street and house level, you actually can go down and see that there and see who else in your neighbourhood is like that. So it's seeing that you're part of a bigger movement. (Morrell)

It's couched for people to be – it's very easy and very easy language. Yeah, it's sort of meeting where people are at. (Morrell)

- **The Big Switch (Greenpeace)**

Hepburn mentions an online-based campaign that has as its objective the broadening of engagement:

We've recently done a project called The Big Switch¹², which is sort of an alliance with a few other organisations, which is – the idea is to build an online platform that will engage a large number of Australians in climate change action. So it's branded and it's positioned slightly differently to Greenpeace. ... So there's been, I think, some good learnings for us from that.

That's still a relatively young campaign, or project that's rolling out. (Hepburn)

- **ActNow (Inspire Foundation)**

Nicholas works on Act Now¹³, a web-based project that 'aims to help young people take action on social issues that affect them and their community'. She suggests that the organisation is finding this online strategy very effective:

the benefits are that for us ... it's a really effective and inexpensive way of reaching lots of young people and doing it in a scaleable way. So in that respect, that's a real benefit and it's such a good tool for organising and for communicating... (Nicholas)

- **Online Action Centre (Amnesty)**

Campbell Case describes Amnesty International's online action centre:

We've got an online action centre where people can personalise their experience which has been quite good. It's had some positive feedback. ... We've seen some results in that way, anecdotal evidence of people saying that they've enjoyed the function or they like being able to go on and look at how many actions they've done in the last week, that kind of stuff. Or how many actions have been done on a specific case or campaign. Or you can go on and look at a particular action and see that 700 people have taken action and you've done 15 this month and you did 12 the month before and that sort of thing. (Campbell Case)

- **Rights at work website (Australian Council of Trade Unions)¹⁴**

This website has been a central component of the 'Your rights at work' campaign mentioned by Tattersall. It has recently been nominated by PoliticsOnline and the World E-Gov Forum for an award in the 'Top 10 Who Are Changing the World of Internet and Politics'.¹⁵ This award, for which winners are chosen by PoliticsOnline subscribers and visitors from around the world recognizes the 'top 10 individuals, organizations and companies having the greatest impact on the way the Internet is changing politics'. In its nomination, the website is described as follows:

Rightsatwork.com.au is run by the Australian Council of Trade Unions, representing working families against the conservative Howard Government's radical workplace policies. Email campaigns educated people about the IR changes and encouraged them to take actions opposing them online. More than 85,000 Australians signed a petition, a record at the time. In three months, the email list grew from 4000 to 95,000, standing now at 170,000. Multiple small online donations from supporters allowed unions to roll out sophisticated advertising. The site's blog, RightsWatch, was a hub for people seeking help after being disadvantaged by the laws. Every query was answered by trained staff. Members of the public provided support. The web was used effectively to organize offline meetings nationwide to discuss the laws and encourage support

¹¹ See the Who on Earth Cares website: <http://www.whoonearthcares.com.au>

¹² See The Big Switch website: <http://www.thebigswitch.com.au>

¹³ See the Act Now website: <http://www.actnow.com.au>

¹⁴ See the Rights at Work website: <http://www.rightsatwork.com.au>

¹⁵ For details of this award, past winners, and the other nominations for 2007, see the PoliticsOnline website:

http://www.politicsonline.com/content/main/specialreports/2007/top10_2007/vote.asp

of the unions' campaign.¹⁶

Benchmarks for response rates to 'calls to action' in e-activism

As the Cancer Council is specifically interested in the kinds of response rates to online or email 'calls to action', findings from the interviewees that relate to this issue are presented below.

It should be noted that some of the response rates referred to are 'ballpark' figures. A number of interviewees indicated that other staff in their organisation (often website managers, or communications staff) would be able to provide more detailed statistics, however there has not been scope within this project to follow this issue up in more detail.

As a generalisation, response rates to e-activism campaigns are typically quite low:

Your percentages of getting people to take action are always fairly low when you do an e-advocacy alert, or an action alert. [...] About 3 per cent would be a really good one [...] But it's typically lower than that. (Gibbs)

Sending out email 'calls to action' is a fairly easy and low-cost exercise for organisations, and hence is becoming increasingly popular. However, this may also be reducing its effectiveness. Gibbs suggests that the sheer number of organisations now using e-activism means that some people feel overwhelmed with e-activist requests from different organisations, and that these emails simply get left unopened in people's already over-ful email inboxes. This may go some way to explaining the typically low response rates.

Gibbs reports that ACS has 25,000 'e-advocates' that the organisation sends email actions to, and also sometimes engages in phone calling strategies, whereby they are encouraged to contact their elected officials by phone. In relation to its priority legislation this year, the ACS California Division ran two e-advocacy campaigns. Response rate data collected by the organization shows that for one campaign 88,099 e-mails were sent over the course of seven months, 13% of emails sent to e-advocates were opened, 1% of users 'clicked through' the links provided and 807 (.09%) took the requested advocacy action (sending an email to their political representative). For the other campaign, 53,830 e-mails were sent over the same period of time. Of those, 12% were opened, 2% of users 'clicked through' and 539 (1%) took the action of sending the message to their representative.¹⁷

Campbell Case mentions a similar approach taken by Amnesty whereby activists are emailed and referred to actions they can take at the organisation's online action centre:

Each fortnight we send out an e-newsletter which has a little bit of information about each of our campaign areas and it has a priority action at the bottom. But it's all linked so if you're only interested in refugees, you can click on refugees and go into the action page. ... I think [the response rate] is something like a 15 per cent open rate and an 8 per cent 'click through' rate or and we send it out to about 40,000 people. (Campbell Case)

It appears that while there may be a small core group of people who will regularly respond to e-activist calls to action, it is not easy to encourage new people to take e-activist actions for the first time:

Last year we were in a referendum campaign in California to raise the

¹⁶ PoliticsOnline website, as above.

¹⁷ The ACS figures quoted here were provided by Gibbs via email and are thus accurate.

tobacco tax, and a few different times we got access to our entire volunteer list, which was about 350,000 names. It took a very special set of circumstances for us to be able to email to that entire list. The response rate was just vastly lower to people who had not been initiated to any advocacy prior to that, any advocacy activity. (Gibbs)

Hepburn's comments underscore this point:

Hepburn: It [response rate] depends on the context. It depends on the action. ... like we just had a really good – we sent out an email yesterday, after we'd been in the news all day on Sunday. Had a really high response rate to that. ... [T]he click through rate – you know, the percentage of people clicking through one of the links, was about 40 per cent of the people who received the email. Which is very high. You know, we've got some lists where on average we'll have ten per cent of people. If we send out a thing about a cyber action, saying contact this company for example, we'd have ten per cent of the list actually doing the action consistently.

Interviewer: Okay. And that's a fairly good response rate, because it's quite a targeted list?

Hepburn: Yeah.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you do quite a lot of targeting with the emailing that you do. You don't commonly just email every single person on every single list.

Hepburn: No. There's not a lot of value in that. I mean, you know, you end up just annoying people. So we tend to target people. We know who's interested in climate change, we know who's interested in food issues, for example. So we tend to contact people based on their interests.

Response rate results for the ACF Who on Earth Cares website are shown on the site itself. It was launched on 6 August 2007, and by 20 September 6,780 people had completed the steps, placed themselves on the map and committed to taking certain actions to reduce their greenhouse impact. It is not clear how many of these had completed the last step and sent a letter to their political representative however, as this step is optional.

Engaging young people

A number of organisations acknowledged the challenge of effectively engaging young people:

I think ACF struggles still with that, and that's why we're working a lot more on an online medium to try and improve that. I think our staff is fairly diverse in terms of having some young people involved. I think a big part of engaging young people, is actually allowing them governance structures to do things their way. And I think you'll often find that when young people organise, they'll have a lot of innovative ideas and they actually need to express that. And they have a wisdom, I think, that often isn't allowed to come out so they get frustrated. (Morrell)

The suggestion here that perhaps the ways that many organisations operate are not always attractive to young people is underscored by Tattersall's comment:

There's an assumption that young people aren't engaging collectively. Well, they are. They just don't do it in traditional community organisations or unions. They're doing it in other ways. (Tattersall)

Some of the organisations felt that they already attracted young people fairly easily. Obviously ActNow's very target group is young people, and Hepburn suggested that Greenpeace already engages many young people.

However other interviewees expressed an interest in attracting greater numbers of young people to their organisation:

[I]n terms of getting younger members, we do a lot of work in trying to appeal to that audience, and particularly trying to encourage more online work. (Morrell)

[T]hey'll [young people] often provide more radical or just fresh thinking when they're looking at something. And I think that that voice isn't heard enough. (Morrell)

We're always interested in getting more young people involved in the organisation ... [W]e don't really have very many 20-something, or 30-something advocacy volunteers. Obviously we'd like more. (Gibbs)

We are very committed to recruiting young supporters. In fact, we have just approved a National Youth Strategy which will see us concentrating on activism, participation and engagement of young people. (Campbell Case)

When asked what kinds of strategies are effective in engaging young people, a number of interviewees talked about the need for organizations to be open to changing the way they work. For example:

I think mainly it's about just going to where young people are. I don't think it's about some weird 'Gen Y' thing that young people somehow have a third eye ... I think they don't connect. It's actually about the organisation changing itself in a sufficient enough way to become more accessible and relevant. (Tattersall)

We've found that young people aren't apathetic. They care deeply about issues, but they need to be involved in ways that resonate with them. It is not young people who are out of touch with NGOs, but NGOs who are out of touch with young people! (Campbell Case)

In particular, Nicholas' experience working on a specific youth engagement strategy at the Inspire Foundation suggests that making the organization genuinely responsive to young people is essential:

I think young people are attracted to the Inspire Foundation because we give them responsibility and we listen to what they say. And I think there's a real sense that they know that the suggestions they make, and the contributions that they make are taken seriously. And where possible we try and implement what young people tell us in the program, and I think that's an incredibly attractive thing.

The Inspire Foundation's youth participation model includes an advisory board, known as 'The Incubator'. Two Incubator programs are held each year, with 15 young people in each program. Nicholas describes how this model is viewed positively by young people:

I remember one of the young people on the most recent youth advisory board sort of said to me, "I can't believe it, it's like you guys are actually working

for us young people, rather than the other way around." And there's that real sense that they feel involved and feel meaningfully involved rather than just in a token kind of way. And I think that's because we really, really listen to what they say, and take that on board and try and our best to kind of integrate that into the delivery of the service. And of course one of the reasons why our program is a success is that the more that young people are involved in developing and designing the program, the more relevant it's going to be for our audience. (Nicholas)

The ability for young people who use the website to determine how they will take action is also an important part of ActNow's philosophy:

It's all about those benefits of feeling good about, and driving your own action. And I suppose what ActNow does, is it gives young people the opportunity to become creators of their own actions and actually, I suppose, explore more creative opportunities for taking action and for participating. So it allows them to write opinion pieces and stories and reflect on their experiences and how they've overcome any of those barriers. Or what they feel the benefits are for them to becoming involved in their community and to share that with other young people and kind of form dialogues and negotiate on the site. So it's all about fostering positive kind of relationships and positive attitudes towards communities and social issues. (Nicholas)

When asked about specific successful strategies for engaging young people, interviewees mentioned a range of tailored programs or initiatives that their organisations have established:

[W]e've done a project around water conservation and young people, because that recognition that that segmentation of the community are high end users of resources. So we developed a project – the delivery method, was as part of a trivia night in a pub. We had a live band and we had a trivia night, and we used popular culture questions as well as environmental questions in there, and we had a GreenHome guide that they referred to, to get the answers. So yeah, so it was a really fun thing and then we have filmed it and are doing a multimedia sort of aspect to it, that we can have on the web as well so it will live beyond that. So we're doing a few of those, so that's one way that we've come at it, is just to sort of, be a bit more fun and groovy and not so boring and serious ... I think that's the other thing, is just always trying to find what are the fun things, I think, that's what actually captures people's hearts and minds. (Morrell)

[W]e have what's called a College Against Cancer; we have different chapters at different universities [...] I think we have about 20 chapters throughout California now. So through the College ... we're working at getting more young people involved, and getting them to stay involved once they graduate from university and start their first jobs. (Gibbs)

We've set up a 'Union Summer' program, which allows people to come in to do a cadetship. We've set up Working Students Union Network, which is a network on university campuses about unionism.. I think that a useful thing that we're going to do is the 'Link', new researchers program, because it's linking into students interests. (Tattersall)

[T]here are obviously university students or post graduate students who work in some of our teams or work like, in internships. The future human rights lawyers of the world, obviously are very active, they come and do six and eight month internships with us full time, unpaid. (Campbell Case)

One of the strengths of the Inspire Foundation is that we have a really strong youth participation model. So young people are involved in all aspects of the program. (Nicholas)

As a general point, Morrell suggests that making online communication methods available is an important means of ensuring that the organisation appeals to young people:

We actually find like in terms of if you want to pay your membership or you want to RSVP to come to a function, that young people don't want to do that on the phone. They actually want to do it online. (Morrell)

Nicholas agrees that using online strategies is an effective way for the organization to communicate with young people because 'it's often where young people are spending a lot of their time'. Further, she suggests two clear reasons why online strategies appeal to young people. Firstly they allow them to determine the level of participation they feel comfortable with, and to do this with anonymity if they choose:

I think for ActNow it's the idea that you can be as, I suppose, as 'present' on the site as you want to be. So you can just go onto the site and read the information and kind of be a bit of a voyeur and read the stories. Or you can actually be more active—commenting and creating other types of content. It allows people to be anonymous or not—it's their choice. (Nicholas)

The second reason Nicholas gives is that internet tools are compatible with young people's busy lives:

I think one of the challenges around working with young people is that like all of us they have really busy lives. They're studying and they're trying to work, or they're working full-time and they've got lots of commitments. And I think what [an online strategy] does, is it allows them to dip in and out when it's good for them. And I think it's important to recognise all those other kind of factors in their lives when trying to engage them as well, and to understand that and to not make them feel guilty for that. So I think the net, or this kind of action, allows them to kind of dip in and out when they want. (Nicholas)

Nicholas points to the ActNow website as an example of an online strategy that is working well for young people:

[T]he content on the ActNow website is actually user generated, so basically young people who are members of the site create content about issues, post action opportunities, comment and blog. ... Young people communicate and discuss things on the site and definitely engage with each other. And then you have dialogues forming around issues and action. (Nicholas)

An innovative feature of the ActNow website is that it has specially trained moderators – young people themselves – who administer the site:

We also have a community building programme, which involves young people moderating content on the site. Community Builders are trained to identify content which breaks the house rules, so the member terms and conditions – whether a racist comment or a defamatory comment – they also work to foster a positive kind of community, so fostering discussion, welcoming new members. So basically, I suppose, trying to let the young people who might never have face-to-face contact with us, sort of understand that there is actually a genuine community behind the program. (Nicholas)

Another aspect that interviewees mentioned as being important for engaging young people is the organisation's ability and willingness to offer them opportunities for skill development and vocational experience:

Tattersall: [S]omething that we're doing differently is this Link program which is where we engage students who are in first year and second year at university to come in and do an internship and gain vocational skills for the future. And I think that it links into the fact that most kids who are at university now are really doing it because they want a vocational outcome. So it links into that interest. But then it's then taking that interest into a new space where it exposes them to the union movement and social justice organisations. Which maybe they have a value commitment to but they don't know how to touch and feel it.

We had four people without even trying this year and we're going to dozens next year. I think that programs like this are vital. Its those two steps, being in the right space and tapping into people's interests.

Facilitator: And actually offering something that they want at that stage in their life...

Interviewee: Exactly. It's meaningful.

Facilitator: ...which is skill development and experience. That's what all young people want to get.

Interviewee: Yes, absolutely. And we're not – it's not confusing Gen Y. It's just, have a think about it from their perspective!

Facilitator: Yes. What did you want at that age, you wanted experience and developing your own skills and networks...

Interviewee: Yeah. Remember!

This understanding, that one of the key things young people are looking for from an organisation is skill development and experience also characterises ActNow's approach to involving young people:

[W]e have up to about 21 young interns who work on ActNow throughout the year. So they come and work for three months at a time, sometimes being placed through university and sometimes just as volunteers. ... [T]hose young people tend to be people who might want to come and work in the office because they feel very passionately about what ActNow and Inspire does. And also because it's a great opportunity for them to further their workplace skills and get experience in that respect. (Nicholas)

[I]t's all about, I suppose, feeling empowered and feeling more confident and increasing your skills, in order to contribute to your community and to connect to other young people and to organisations who have opportunities for young people. (Nicholas)

Measuring and evaluating activism and advocacy strategies

Many interviewees talked about the challenges of measuring the impact of their activism and engagement strategies:

[I]n politics it's really hard to quantify. There's an old saying in politics, you know half of what you're doing is successful, you just don't know which half.

(Gibbs)

It's very hard to evaluate. (Gibbs)

[I]f you're looking for evidence-based results in the political realm, sometimes it's not there to quantify, I guess. You know when you've done it right, or you know when you win. But I guess it's not—I don't know if there's a good way to really apply the scientific method to grassroots advocacy. Our vice president ... he always likes to say, you know, politics is more an art than a science. (Gibbs)

[I]t's difficult to measure the impact that you're having in terms of numbers because many young people use the site without registering and also because it's not always possible to know what impact the site has had on offline activities. However, we do conduct annual user profiling and evaluate our youth participation program using a combination of evaluation tools. (Nicholas)

Some aspects of campaigning are obviously quantifiable. The number and diversity of people who are mobilised into taking action, is one measure of success that is commonly referred to:

Often it's about numbers, like say for submissions or write a letter to your MP. It's the numbers, the geographical spread, and the demographic spread. (Morrell)

Increasingly, online strategies are making this counting of participants easier to measure:

[W]e know how many people take action. When we send out an action alert, we are able to see who's taken action and who hasn't. Our national office in Washington DC, they're able to, or they say they're going to be able to, put together a report on who's taken action, on what issues, and grade the e-advocates on their frequency of action. So that's one way that it's quantifiable... (Gibbs).

We can count the number of people who do the online email and press 'send'. But for those targets that don't have email addresses, all we can do is, they can prepare their letter on our website, but instead of pressing 'send' they press 'print' so it will automatically print it to their printer. We obviously don't know if they mail it off but we can count that they've at least developed it and printed it. (Campbell Case)

Amnesty uses a number of quantitative measures to evaluate what it calls 'activism health':

We can look at the number of activists that we have and the type of activists they are. So we might have interns or volunteers or e-activists or individual activists or group based activists or governance style activists. We can look at the total actions taken and we can look at those ... by region or by campaign or by type of activist. We can look at the forms of actions taken, so whether it's online, whether it's a written petition, whether it's an event, whether it's a visit to an MP, whether it's a letter to a decision maker. We can look at things like the take-up of training modules by action groups, satisfaction with training modules. We can look at things like retention and attrition, recruitment, which obviously we won't be do until we have a database ... but that's the sort of thing that we're looking at being able to do by the end of the 18 months. (Campbell Case)

Another measure of effectiveness that was mentioned is the speed with which supporters can be mobilised to participate in a particular campaign:

[I] can tell it's working when we—for instance ... all these in-district meetings we were able to have last week, or a couple of weeks ago, and how quickly the volunteers sprung at the opportunity to do that. And I will say, a few years ago, or five years ago, we weren't able to do that, we weren't able to have that level of taking action so quickly amongst our volunteers. (Gibbs)

Morrell mentions that, while it is too early to evaluate the Who on Earth Cares online initiative (although there are plans to do so), for many of its programs, ACF uses 'the amount of resources saved' as one quantifiable measure of success, because one of ACF's aims is to reduce Australia's ecological footprint. The cost of campaign work relative to the people reached is also an important consideration for ACF:

I guess to some extent, it's financial bang for buck. If we're reaching people and we're able to do that efficiently, because we don't want to waste people's money – being a not for profit organisation. (Morrell).

Tattersall notes that some evaluations are too narrowly focused on policy outcomes, and she calls for more of a focus on organisational outcomes:

[T]he union movement does try to do evaluation after campaigns. That evaluation often focuses on outcomes, policy outcomes, rather than organisational outcomes. I think that you need to build in those questions. (Tattersall)

As an example of this approach, Tattersall refers to her work on what makes a successful coalition (between union or community organisations). In her PhD on this topic, she proposed a framework for evaluation that looked at three criteria to judge the effectiveness of organising and coalitions. These are the issues on which organizations worked, the organisational space or structure, and the scale at which relationships were facilitated. Tattersall reported that her approach to evaluation looked not only at policy outcomes, and whether the strategy shaped the political climate, but also at organisational outcomes, namely 'were sustainable relationships with the other organisations created and did the coalition increase the capacity of the participating organisation?'. (Tattersall)

The following exchange with Gibbs suggests that while ACS has (legislative) political change as its ultimate objective, it also places a high value on process measures – those indicators or how such change is sought. In particular, the organisation looks to levels of participation and engagement, capacity building and raising public awareness as measures of success:

Facilitator: [I] guess there'd be some people who'd say that with activism and advocacy, the way that you evaluate it is, Did you change the thing you wanted to change? It's absolutely the end point is all that counts, and if you didn't achieve that, then you've failed.

Then other people say that you can evaluate the steps along the way, and that there's capacity-building, and there's democratic participation outcomes that you achieve, and there's engagement of people with the issues, and all those kinds of less tangible things that happen along the way.

Interviewee: I guess I would say it's both. Ultimately, if you win, if you achieved your objective, you won. But if you don't achieve your objective, it is important to look at the—there was some value in the way your volunteers were engaged. And you can tell if they didn't do anything, that was a failure; and if they were engaged throughout the entire process, they built capacity, you contacted this many legislators, your volunteers took—even though you

didn't achieve your objective, it was still a successful campaign.

Facilitator: You can still point to some valuable outcomes?

Interviewee: Yeah, and I mentioned there a referendum on a tobacco tax last year. And I would say we didn't win; the tobacco industry spent \$70 million to defeat the initiatives, and we lost by just a couple of points. But from the American Cancer Society's perspective, we had a very successful campaign, because we mobilised our volunteers like we've never done before. It was the biggest mobilisation of our volunteers we've ever had.

We had to collect signatures; it takes over a million signatures to get a referendum on the ballot, and just the American Cancer Society collected 100,000 of those, all through our volunteers; 100,000 phone calls to voters; we handed our nearly 400,000 voter pamphlets; we had speakers' bureaus; we did peer-to-peer contact. So in that respect, there was probably nothing more that the American Cancer Society could have done to influence that.

And although it keeps me up at night thinking about what we could have done different, I would have to say overall that was a successful campaign for us in terms of peer groups, grassroots advocacy and mobilising our volunteers.

Facilitator: Sure. Would you also look to other outcomes like changing the terms of public debate, or increasing positive media coverage, or changing public opinion?

Interviewee: Sure, that's a part of it as well. Sometimes when we might pick a particular issue that we know we don't have a chance at, to bring up that issue. In California, it takes a two-thirds vote threshold in the legislature to raise a tax—so for instance the tobacco tax—but we keep pushing bills through to raise the tobacco tax knowing that our chances of getting it past aren't that likely, but it does raise the issue, and we do mobilise our volunteers around that issue.

I guess the same would go for media. I can't think of an example off the top of my head, but it wouldn't be inconceivable to go with a bill that we know may not get past, but we're using that particular legislation as a vehicle to raise an issue.

Amnesty has a comprehensive mix of criteria that it uses to evaluate two key areas of its work, namely campaigns and 'activism health':

Campbell Case: So in terms of campaigns, we establish key performance indicators in our operational planning process so we kind of just measure progress towards those KPI targets. So sometimes it might be that we want 100 groups to participate in the write-a-thon or we want 2000 people to join the Bluetooth relay, that kind of thing. So obviously we can measure those.

We also look at the achievement of the actual campaign objectives. So if it's for our internet repression campaign and one of our objectives is that one of the five internet dissidents in China is released, then obviously we can say that's happened.

We also look at impact on influencers. So how many media inquiries we get, how many media interviews we do, how many media hits we get and whether or not they're positive or negative, whether they carry our messages or not.

Also things like whether or not other decision makers or other influencers are carrying our messages. So if it's, for example, Google releasing a public statement talking about how they're going to provide greater transparency in their dealings with China, that public statement would be something that we would look at.

Also things like parliamentary mentions, you know, just other kind of influencers or decision makers who are picking up on our messages and using our language and that kind of thing.

Interviewer: Whether you're sort of influencing the terms of the debate?

Campbell Case: Yeah, influencing the influencers. So that's how we're going to be looking at whether or not we're winning our campaigns. Because our campaigns are really long term. Some of our campaigns may need to run forever, you know, the death penalty for example.

ActNow also has clear criteria that it uses to evaluate its strategies. As Nicholas explains, because of the youth participation objectives of their program, many of their outcomes-focussed criteria are about outcomes for young people themselves (such as rates of participation, or increased knowledge and understanding) rather than policy outcomes. They also include organisational criteria (such as brand awareness):

We do a user profiling survey ... looking at the impact the site's had on our key objectives, which include knowledge and understanding of social issues and political institutions and structures. And the impact we've had on increasing young people's skills and confidence and rates of participation, as well as questions around connectedness and trust. We also obviously evaluate our youth participation programs and plan to conduct awareness surveys, to determine our brand awareness in the market. (Nicholas)

What research do organisations conduct with their members?

Many interviewees referred to some kind of research that they carry out in order to inform their organisation's strategies:

We're doing a lot of research to work out what barriers and motivators are. We're doing a general health check on activism. We need a database. Then once we have an idea about those things, we'll be able to design recruitment strategies and retention initiatives specifically to address those barriers and motivators. (Campbell Case)

[T]he whole model of ActNow is developed around research, particularly into the barriers and benefits of taking action. ... Prior to launch, we had three youth advisory boards and internship programs working on the development of the site. So young people had a significant impact on the development and delivery of the service. (Nicholas)

ActNow also builds in feedback loops for its members on an ongoing basis. This is a key means by which the program is developed:

We run two youth advisory boards per year which drive the development and delivery of the program, and are often focused on a particular area that we want to develop. (Nicholas)

Most organisations reported seeking feedback from their members/supporters in a structured way (such as through member surveys, or focus groups) and building this into their campaign development.

We do a user profiling survey which measures the impact the service has had against the program objectives. ... We're also planning on doing an awareness study, looking at our brand awareness in the market. (Nicholas)

We actually did some focus groups reasonably recently ... and our specific purpose for doing that was to look at motivators and barriers to activism. (Campbell Case)

Hepburn gives some examples for Greenpeace:

Hepburn: We do supporter surveys fairly regularly. We ask them different kinds of questions. We do focus groups with our supporters around that as well.

Interviewer: Okay. Then do you use those in your campaign work?

Hepburn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So that's just a matter of course, really.

Hepburn: Yeah. We do public polling as well. So not just for our supporters, but we'll poll the public on what do you think about these issues? Or we'll sometimes run focus groups or we test messages, so that we can really try and develop communication strategies that hit the mark.

Gibbs reports that ACS conducts evaluations with its activists after each of its quarterly conference calls and yearly meetings.

Responding to supporter feedback was seen as absolutely critical:

We do regular market research within our – of our members, to get feedback and certainly take that very seriously and take that on board. Like we listen to what they're saying to improve what we're doing and ascertain what issues they're interested in seeing us do. (Morrell)

I think we would be foolish not to take their feedback seriously, and not to seek as much feedback as we can. Because, like I mentioned earlier, making them feel part of it—it's not just about making them feel part of it, it's that they are part of it, and that their say matters. And they have to know that their say matters. ... It's really important to get feedback from the volunteers on things we can do better, on ways to better engage them. So if we weren't listening to what the volunteers are saying, that would be at our peril. (Gibbs)

• PART 4: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TCCN

This section draws out some of the potential implications for TCCN that have been suggested by the research undertaken for this project. It also considers the findings from the Consumer Advocate Evaluation Survey (TCCN 2005), and reflects on these in light of the literature reviewed, and the interviews conducted in order to suggest some possibly valuable future areas of focus for the organization.

Change is social: the importance of bringing people together

A strong theme in the literature is the importance of recognising the social element of change, and facilitating activism by enabling, supporting, and strengthening social connections and peer networks.

Robinson (2004) suggests that 'voluntary change depends on bringing people together', and that one of the most effective roles for a program designer is to create and facilitate 'change spaces' – or events that introduce people to each other and enable them to work together. The emphasis, he says, should be on people interacting with each other, not with 'experts'. It would seem that some of the TCCN's existing programs, particularly the Regional Advocacy Networks, are a means of doing precisely this. Indeed the results of the Consumer Advocate Evaluation Survey (Cancer Council 2005:14) show that many of the positive comments about these groups focus on the social aspects – knowing other people, or meeting in their own area, having an opportunity to network, and meeting with 'similar minded people'. As such, continuing and building upon these kinds of initiatives would appear to be strongly supported by the behaviour change literature.

Interviewees strongly supported these findings, suggesting that the social benefits of involvement are both a key motivator for people to become involved in activism and an explanation for why people maintain their involvement over time. For organisations seeking to recruit and retain members, supporters and activists, it is absolutely critical that engagement strategies are driven by this recognition. Providing opportunities for people to connect, communicate and build relationships with other people is key to ensuring that their involvement is socially rewarding and hence likely to be sustained over time.

A decentralised, 'scaled-down' structure of participation is preferable

A strong theme to emerge from the interviews was the importance of thinking about the scale at which organisations engage people. In particular, providing opportunities for people to engage at a 'local' level was seen as critical. A structure that involves decentralised groups of some kind, which operate somewhat independently, but that are actively supported and resourced by the larger organisation was seen as an effective model. Again, the TCCN's RAN and other Action Groups appear to be examples of this very approach. There are many suggestions in the interview material for how such 'local' level or issues-based groups can be appropriately supported by the organisation, and these may be particularly useful for TCCN to consider.

Communication strategies are important, but secondary to social networks

Communication strategies are important, and the review suggests that social marketing can be a useful approach to the development of effective strategies.

However, it is also clear that information and communication strategies will not be effective in creating change on their own. The literature clearly suggests that it is social interactions with other people that are the most powerful. The focus for those attempting to increase participation in activism and advocacy should be on enabling personal contact, building social networks and facilitating social connections – it is these kinds of approaches that have the most potential as change strategies.

Insights from the interviewees are helpful here too – with many noting that communication channels need to be more decentralised, and that organisations need to bring the scale of both their organising and communication down to a more ‘local’ level. Their comments also suggested that there needs to be as much focus on enabling peer-to-peer communication, and ‘bottom-up’ communication (from members to the organisation) as there is on ‘top-down’, or ‘one-to-many’ communication. Many interviewees admitted that their organisations struggle with this balance. However there seemed to be an increasing recognition of the importance of rebuilding local level or ‘grassroots’ communication and participatory structures and processes.

Online strategies have potential, as part of a broad suite of tools

The emerging literature on the use of information communication technology as a tool for activism and advocacy suggests that this approach may be worthy of further investigation. Such strategies may be an effective means of targeting particular groups of people (such as young people), although the literature suggests that they are likely to be of most use in engaging those people who are already engaged and active, rather than in recruiting new activists. Further, it seems that while many organizations have succeeded in using technology to communicate with people, and link them more effectively to the organization, there are less examples of technology being successful in linking people *to each other* and creating the kinds of peer networks that are so critical in promoting social change.

Interviewees were extremely interested in the positive potential of online strategies, and most organisations were trialling approaches of this type – some with the aim of providing existing supporters with new (and often easier, or less time consuming) ways of taking action, and some as an attempt to appeal to, or reach a broader or ‘mainstream’ audience. While all interviewees saw online approaches as having a place in the ‘toolkit’ of strategies available to organisations, many were also cautious about expecting too much from such approaches or seeing them as a simple ‘answer’. There was a feeling that they should augment rather than replace more traditional methods, both of campaigning and lobbying and or organising people.

Strategies should target those people who are predisposed to change

The literature makes clear how important segmentation of the potential ‘audience’ of any strategy is. Different groups of people will be at different stages of ‘readiness’ to change, and will have different preferences and capacities for the kinds of action they might participate in. It is important therefore, not to rely on ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategies for recruitment and increasing participation, but to carefully tailor strategies to particular groups.

For example, the TCCN survey report notes that many people were very positive about their involvement in Cancer Voices, and also that most of these people’s involvement did not go beyond receiving information. It seems that for many people this level of involvement is appropriate and satisfying, and there is not what Robinson would call a ‘predisposing factor’ for them to increase their level of involvement. This suggests that these people are perhaps not the best target audience for any initiative that aims to increase levels of involvement. According to this theory of behaviour change, more promising segments of the potential ‘audience’ would be:

- those who are more actively involved but experiencing a level of dissatisfaction or frustration, and
- those who have tried to become involved but have been unable to or have experienced difficulties accessing opportunities (see example comments TCCN 2005:13).

The interviewees expressed many different views about 'who to target' and how to target different groups of people. Most were taking a combination of approaches – some trying to engage large numbers of people in small actions, and others trying to support and resource a small number of highly active people. At the same time, there is a desire among a number of organisations to develop a broader, more 'mainstream' appeal. There was also evidence that organisations are increasingly focusing on ways that they can take their supporters on a 'journey' that allows (and encourages) them to increase their 'level' of involvement.

Organisations need to clearly identify and promote the benefits of participation

Clues to some of the perceived benefits for advocates of greater levels of involvement can be found in the TCCN report – particularly in the comments about the consumer advocacy forum (TCCN 2005:15). These may be examples of potentially useful 'satisfying factors' (as described in Robinson's model) that can be built upon in strategies to maintain the motivation of existing activists and to encourage others to become involved.

Interviewees report that their organisations conduct various kinds of research and feedback processes with their members. These various processes are seen as critical, and lined to the organisation's effectiveness. They are aimed at understanding the motivators and 'satisfying factors' for their members and supporters and at building these into their work on an ongoing basis. Creating ways for people to share their stories about involvement with the organisation, and to talk to others about the kinds of benefits that they experience is an important means of promoting these benefits. Given the importance of social networks, it is likely that hearing (or reading) these stories from other people – preferably people with whom they have some connection – is likely to be a more powerful form of engagement for potential and new members than 'top-down' messages from the organisation itself about the benefits of involvement.

There is a need to respond to identified barriers

As discussed in Part 2, a key component of developing any behaviour change strategy is identifying and addressing the specific barriers to action. Some of the barriers for potential TCCN activists and advocates are identified in some of the comments reported in the evaluation survey report (TCCN 2005). Barriers include lack of time, support or confidence, difficulty accessing groups, lack of 'fit' between specific interest and perceptions of available opportunities, and lack of understanding of advocacy. The approach described below, of providing opportunities for 'learning by doing' may be an effective way to help address these kinds of barriers.

Interviewees concurred with this analysis of the many barriers that people face to engagement and participation, and provided a wealth of suggestions about how to overcome such barriers. They underscored the view that organisations need to constantly focus on making involvement as easy as possible. Critically this means providing opportunities that are compatible with people's lives and interests, and that are at an appropriate scale, by 'meeting people where they are'.

Providing opportunities for 'learning by doing' is an effective way to build confidence

The literature is clear that confidence, or 'self-efficacy' is an essential enabling factor for activists. Robinson argues that in particular, it is 'hands-on learning' that helps to build a sense of self-efficacy. As Robinson puts it:

'[M]ost people are capable of far more than they admit to themselves. Overcoming this self-doubt can simply be a matter of creating safe opportunities for people to trial the action and by experiencing success increase their confidence in their abilities. Adult educators have always emphasised the power of experiential learning. If confidence is an issue for your actors (and it usually is) you may want to set up opportunities for people to learn by doing...' (2004).

The TCCN evaluation suggests that there is scope to use hands on learning, or 'learning by doing' to build people's confidence. Many of the comments from respondents to the TCCN evaluation survey (for example those on p. 12 about the need for follow-up after initial training, skills development to increase confidence, and a local issue focus) suggest that people are looking for more opportunities to take action, but are still at a stage where they would like these to be facilitated by TCCN because they lack the confidence to initiate action themselves.

A number of the interviewees touch on this point, and generally support an approach that gives people the opportunity to 'learn by doing', and to build their own confidence. Some of the specific ways of doing this that were suggested include providing appropriate training, support and resources for activists, and establishing decentralised structures that allow people to both be involved at a smaller, more appropriate and less intimidating scale, and also to have a say in the direction of the organisation.

Evaluation is part of the change process

The literature suggests that the evaluation of activism or advocacy strategies should consider more than just their influence on public policy. In particular, attention should be paid to organisational capacity building outcomes. Furthermore, evaluation is clearly written about as part of the change process and as such should be seen as a learning opportunity for both activists and organizations.

Interviewees reported that evaluation of their programs and activities, and seeking feedback from their members was an important and highly valued part of their work. They reported that organisations were typically using a very wide range of criteria to evaluate what they do – including policy or outcomes-focussed criteria, but also including a large number of organisational or process-based measures.

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Appendix A: Best practices for organizations seeking to improve the performance of their online communications programs.

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Appendix A: Best practices for organizations seeking to improve the performance of their online communications programs.

(Source: Smith et al 2006: 47)

1. Budget for success.

Given the clear relationship between the size of an organization's online communications budget and their results, nonprofits that want to achieve greater success online should consider increasing their online communications budgets. For the study partners we saw a clear relationship between the online communications budget and two key indicators of success: the amount raised in online donations and the total number of advocacy actions taken.

2. Grow your e-mail list to increase online advocacy and fundraising impact.

The study found that organizations with larger e-mail lists were better able to achieve online fundraising success, and saw significantly greater results in terms of online advocacy outcomes. If either of these are a priority for your organization, growing your e-mail list is one key way to improve your results.

3. Anticipate and track list churn.

When planning for e-mail list growth, organizations must anticipate list churn. With 28 percent of all e-mail subscribers becoming unreachable, on average, within a 12-month period, it is critical to compensate for list churn and substantially grow an email list. Organizations should also establish tracking mechanisms to track churn rate.

4. Increase retention of list subscribers.

Organizations with a greater percentage of subscribers retained on e-mail lists for longer than one year saw higher action participation rates and generated more citizen letters. Organizations should pursue list management strategies to increase the longevity of e-mail list subscribers by increasing retention rates and reducing churn.

5. Carefully track marketing and recruitment efforts.

Successful return on investment analysis absolutely depends on an organization establishing careful tracking mechanisms up front, before online marketing programs are launched. Because of the way many vendors store and report data, it is often impossible to reconstruct accurate results for advertising campaigns that took place just a few months ago. Organizations should know what data points you want to track before recruitment campaigns are launched. In addition to measuring subscriber retention, some organizations may want to measure the amount of online activism generated, funds donated, and offline activists recruited.

6. Test optimizing day of the week for advocacy message launch.

Study data indicate that advocacy messages sent on Thursdays and Fridays receive slightly higher open rates than e-mail messages sent on other days of the week. We would strongly recommend, however, that organizations test this with their own email list prior to making a wholesale change in the day of week they send their email messages.

7. Carefully target and segment e-mail messages.

Data indicate that advocacy messages targeted by geographic area yield higher open and response rates for online activism and online fundraising than messages sent to the entire list. To boost response rates, organizations should develop strategies to more carefully target some e-mail messages.

8. Act quickly to respond to timely events.

Some of the success that international aid organizations had with online fundraising in 2004-2005 was due to the dramatic surge in online fundraising in support of Asian tsunami relief efforts. This was made possible, in part, by reacting quickly to this emergency, to make information about relief efforts and donation opportunities available via organizational Web sites and to e-mail subscribers. All organizations should have rapid response fundraising plans in place to move quickly in response to urgent events and give subscribers opportunities to donate online.

Appendix B: Menu of outcomes for advocacy and policy work

(Source: Reisman et al 2007)

1. Shift in social norms	
<i>Examples of outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in awareness • Increased agreement on definition of problem (eg common language) • Changes in beliefs • Changes in attitudes • Changes in values • Changes in the salience of an issue • Increased alignment of campaign goal with core societal values • Changes in public behavior
<i>Examples of strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing issues • Media campaign • Message development (eg defining the problem, framing, naming) • Development of trusted messengers and champions
2. Strengthened organizational capacity	
<i>Examples of outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved management of organizational capacity of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work • Improved strategic abilities of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work • Improved capacity to communicate and promote advocacy messages of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work • Improved stability of organizations involved with advocacy and policy work
<i>Examples of strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership development • Organizational capacity building • Communication skill building • Strategic planning
3. Strengthened alliances	
<i>Examples of outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased number of partners supporting an issue • Increased level of collaboration (eg coordination) • Improved alignment of partnership efforts (eg shared priorities, shared goals, common accountability system) • Strategic alliances with important partners (eg stronger or more powerful relationships and alliances) • Increased ability of coalitions working toward policy change to identify policy change process (eg venue of policy change, steps of policy change based on strong understanding of the issue and barriers, jurisdiction of policy change)
<i>Examples of strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership development • Coalition development • Cross-sector campaigns • Joint campaigns • Building alliances among unlikely allies
4. Strengthened base of support	
<i>Examples of outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased public involvement in an issue • Increased level of actions taken by champions of an issue • Increased voter registration • Changes in voting behavior • Increased breadth of partners supporting an issue (eg number of "unlikely allies" supporting an issue) • Increased media coverage (eg quantity, prioritization, extent of coverage, variety of media "beats," message echoing) • Increased awareness of campaign principles and messages among selected groups (eg policymakers, general public, opinion leaders) • Increased visibility of the campaign message (eg engagement in debate, presence of campaign message in the media) • Changes in public will

<i>Examples of strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community organizing • Media campaigns • Outreach • Public/ grassroots engagement campaign • Voter registration campaign • Coalition development • Development of trusted messengers and champions • Policy analysis and debate • Policy impact statements
5. Improved policies	
<i>Examples of outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy development • Policy adoption (eg legislation, legally binding agreements) • Policy implementation (e.g., equity, adequate funding, other resources for implementing policy) • Policy enforcement (eg holding the line on bedrock legislation)
<i>Examples of strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific research • Development of “white papers” • Development of policy proposals • Pilots/ demonstration programs • Educational briefings of legislators • Watchdog function
6. Changes in impact	
<i>Examples of outcomes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved social and physical conditions (eg poverty, habitat diversity, health, equality, democracy)
<i>Examples of strategies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combination of direct service and systems-changing strategies

Appendix C: Questionnaire used for semi-structured interviews with representatives from other organizations

- *Brief introduction to the project. Explain conducted by ISF on behalf of TCCN.*
- *Offer to share findings when report is completed.*
- *Seek permission to record conversation to assist with transcription.*
- *Offer respondent the option of making comments anonymously or having them attributed to them / their organisation.*

About your audience / the kinds of people who become involved with your organisation

Why do you think people become involved in your organisation – what motivates them to become involved in advocacy or activism with you?

Do the people who are involved in your organisation share any characteristics – are they a particular segment of the population? Have you explicitly identified segments to target? How did you do this? How do you use this understanding of your ‘audience’ in your strategies?

Strategies to recruit / attract NEW PEOPLE

In general, what kinds of motivations do you try to tap into in your strategies to attract / recruit new people?

Do you have any examples of particularly successful campaigns that you’ve run – that have motivated high numbers of people? If yes, what do you think it was that made them successful?

What have you identified as barriers for people to become involved in activism / advocacy with you? What strategies have you developed to address these barriers and how effective have they been?

Some of the literature on these issues suggests that the kinds of people who are likely to be active as advocates or activists tend to be people who are already busy – either with other kinds of activism/ civic engagement, or with personal responsibilities. Have you found this? And have you found ways to spread the load - ie attract new players or to manage the load on already very busy people?

Any accumulated wisdom about engaging with young people and any specific differences in strategies or organisational capacity for effectively involving young people in activism?

Strategies relating to EXISTING MEMBERS

What methods do you use to keep your existing ‘members’ engaged? How do you sustain people’s involvement?

How do you communicate with your members, and how often?

What communication methods and frequencies have you tried that did not work, and why?

Do you have formal communication methods in place for activists/advocates to communicate with each other? How successful is this?

Types / levels of involvement

Do you consciously try to increase the ‘level’ of activism of your members? If so, how do you do this?

For example, attempts to persuade those on a mailing list to be more involved in a campaign, or to take some sort of action.

Can you identify any factors that prompt your members to ‘higher’ levels of involvement/ activism? (for example taking action as opposed to only receiving information)

Online / e-activism

Have you used any forms of online or e-activism? How successful have you found it? What do you see as the benefits and constraints? Advantages / downsides? How does it compare to other strategies you use?

Are there particular segments of your audience that seem more keen to embrace e-activism?

Do you use emails to issue a 'call to action' of some kind to your members? If so, what kind of response rate do you get?

Do you use other methods (mail outs, phone calls)? What kind of response rate is typical for these? Is there a difference in response rate between fundraising and activism actions?

Evaluation / evidence used to inform strategies

What evidence do you use to base your strategies on?

For example, any surveys of members, on these issues? (recruitment, engagement involvement, types of activities motivators/barriers etc)? Other feedback from members (eg. evaluations of training, feedback forms on website, emails etc). Do you use this to develop strategies? [Can we see any research if available?]

How do you evaluate your work, particularly your campaign work? What measures do you use? Do you have benchmarks for what constitutes an effective campaign (in terms of engagement)?

Thank you – suggested referrals?

Can you suggest anyone else – in other organisations – who you think I should speak to?

Appendix D: Email text to recruit interviewees

Dear _____

My name is Emma and I am a researcher at the Institute for Sustainable Futures at the University of Technology, Sydney.

I am currently working on a small research project on behalf of the Cancer Council NSW, looking at strategies to engage people in activism and advocacy. I have conducted a review of relevant literature, and am now looking to supplement this with some practice-based information, views and opinions from a few not-for-profit organisations.

_____ suggested that you might be willing to assist with this component of our research.

If so, I'd like to request a phone interview with you. This would be a semi-structured interview - I have developed a series of questions to use as a framework, but I'm hoping to have a 'structured conversation' with you, rather than conduct it like a phone survey. Broadly, the interview would cover the following kinds of issues:

- > what you understand the motivators and barriers to be for people to get involved with/engage with your organisation
- > how your organisation approaches 'recruitment' and engagement of new people - what strategies you find to be most successful
- > how you communicate with your existing 'members' or contacts (broadly defined), and how you keep them motivated, or encourage them to increase their level of engagement/activism
- > whether you use online or e-activism strategies and what you see as their pros and cons compared to other forms of organising/engagement
- > whether and how you evaluate (formally or informally) the strategies you use to engage people in activism and advocacy - what criteria you use to measure success.

The interview would take approximately 20-30 minutes. I would record the interview, just to assist me with transcription and write-up, and would ask you to consent to the attribution of your comments to either yourself or your organisation. Alternatively I can quote you anonymously in the report if you would prefer. In appreciation of your participation, the Cancer Council would be happy to share the results of the research with you.

If you are willing to participate in this project, could you please nominate a time when it would be convenient for me to call you, preferably between Friday 24-Friday 30 August?

Thanks in advance for your time
Kind regards

Emma

Emma Partridge
Research Principal
Institute for Sustainable Futures
University of Technology, Sydney
Tel. (02) 9514 4954

Appendix E: Interviewees

Name / position	Organisation	Interview date
Timothy Gibbs Legislative Advocacy Manager	American Cancer Society California Division, Inc	29/08/2007
Elle Morrell Greenhome Outreach Coordinator	Australian Conservation Foundation	29/08/2007
Mariesa Nicholas ActNow Program Manager (Acting)	ActNow (Inspire Foundation)	04/09/2007
John Hepburn Outreach Manager	Greenpeace	04/09/2007
Amanda Tattersall Research Director	Working NSW	11/09/2007
Jennifer Campbell Case Activism Manager	Amnesty International	13/09/2007