

LOST VOICES.

Digital campaigning and the voices of lived experience

FOREWORD

Direct lived experience of social issues provides valuable knowledge and power to drive, lead and pioneer positive social change in society. Yet the wider social sector often fails to effectively harness this power for change. The digital campaigning space is a prime example of where people and communities with lived experience are speaking out loud and calling for change yet their voices are often ignored or muted – lost in the maze of activity and practices currently being used to communicate and influence key decision-makers.

The Lost Voices report is an important and bold depiction of the digital campaigning space, holding up a mirror to current organizational practices used to influence legislative and/or policy reform. It questions whether commonly used digital campaigning efforts are effective and whether such efforts are truly representative of people with lived experience – those directly impacted by the campaign issue.

The report helpfully unpacks the drivers, enablers and recipients of campaigning efforts, and challenges organizational structures and relationships between key stakeholders needed to effect positive change. Importantly, recognizing the need for digital campaigners to do much more to meaningfully place people and communities with lived experience of the causes they pursue at the heart of their initiatives.

As a human rights lawyer, I've witnessed the power of digital campaigns that have been shaped and led by young people with lived experience of immigration status issues. Digital campaigns spearheaded by the Dreamers in the US and the Let Us Learn campaign in the UK have changed laws, policies and informed redesign of public service provision.

I hope that the key players in the digital campaigning space take notice of the recommendations in this report. They are comprehensively laid out to speak to those that have a stake in this space - to help redirect and maximize the power of digital campaigning in social change.

The findings in this research are especially important because they shift us from problem understanding towards practical solutions and ideas to tackle internal and external barriers limiting the lived experience, which allows for an immediate change in behaviour and practices. It encourages us to rethink how we can structure, support and fund digital campaigning work, whilst also recognizing the role of tech innovators in helping to facilitate new possibilities and practices to enable collective action for positive change.

I thank the Social Change Agency for shining a spotlight on the value and role of lived experience in the digital campaigning space. It is time we did more across our wider social sector operations.

Baljeet Sandhu

2014 Clore Social Fellow, 2017 Yale World Fellow, and author of the report *The Value of Lived Experience in Social Change* (2017)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report and its accompanying toolkit is the culmination of the Lost Voices project, funded by JRCT. The project examines the role of digital campaigning in influencing the ability of the voices of those most marginalised to be heard by those in power. It builds on Esther Foreman's research *Peering In* (2011)¹ and *Shouting Down The House* (2013)², which established that current digital campaigning methods were drowning out the voices of lived experience.

This report primarily focuses on the digital campaigning work being undertaken by charities and not-for-profits. It also acknowledges the role that politicians, technology providers and foundations have in formulating solutions. The report contains recommendations directed at each of these key players.

Over the past year we have engaged **over 100 MPs, technology providers, charity digital leads and those with lived experience** to gain a comprehensive overview of the digital campaigning sector as it stands in 2017/2018. We also ran a hackathon in December 2017, bringing together the charity sector leads to help identify the issue and build a solution.

The research highlights the breakdown of trust between the key players in the digital campaigning space: decision makers, charities, technology providers and those with lived experience. The report suggests that while this is largely a result of the overuse of unfocused email campaigning techniques, it is exacerbated by factors such as metrics of success, the tools used and the availability of resources.

The report acknowledges that decision-makers are influenced positively by contact with those with lived experience and in theory, digital campaigning should allow for greater contact between the two groups. Charities have an important intermediary role in voicing the concerns of the lived experience to those in power. However, it suggests that the rise in digital campaigning techniques has led to a general degradation in the relationship between charities and decision-makers. Moreover, it says the voices of those with lived experience are often inadequately represented in charity digital campaigns: digital campaigners often work in silos, away from those with lived experience (and even organisational colleagues); those with lived experience are inadequately supported in participating in campaigning; and charities are often poor in identifying which of their campaigning supporters are able to offer lived experience.

The impact of these has been to undermine the trust of people with lived experience in the campaigning process and to cause considerable harm to the relationship between charities and decision-makers, reducing the effectiveness of the former's campaigning efforts in general. In order to reverse this erosion in trust, we have developed a toolkit to enable charities to interrogate their digital campaigning practices to enable the voices of people with the lived experiences to be heard better by those in power. The key recommendations for charities to be taken from the toolkit are as follows:

Recommendations for charities

Recommendation

Action

When innovating on a digital campaigning tactic, ensure that any new initiative is easy, inclusive, connective and far reaching

- Use the Lost Voices toolkit to run refine the proposed initiative

Charities should work towards centering the voices of lived experience at the heart of their digital campaigning

- Develop meaningful and equitable opportunities for those with lived experience into leadership positions through support, training, ambassador work, apprenticeships and paid work

Charities should ensure that their work is meaningfully informed by the knowledge and voices of those with lived experience to rebuild trust with decision makers (and their beneficiaries)

- If a member of staff is meeting a decision maker, ensure the voice of the lived experience is present, respected and nurtured

Charities should use their knowledge and resources to support and improve the direct relationship a decision maker has with those with lived experience or those who support a campaign

- Create an integrated communications plan to meaningfully include voices of lived experience
- Segment supporters and give those with lived experience a unique user journey
- Create more sophisticated technology to allow for a decision maker to identify a supporter or someone with lived experience

In order for digital campaigning to stay innovative, it's important to share skills across all areas of the organisation

- Train up teams within the organisation in basic digital skills
- Seek outside influence. Is there anything from outside sectors that can be transposed to the organisation?
- Create a best-practice checklist within the organisation

Collaborating with organisations of varying sizes can streamline a digital campaign and thus improve its effectiveness. It's through collaboration that campaigns turn into movements

- Team up with other organisations to create a collaborative event
 - If you are an organisation with more resources and capacity, can you offer organisations with fewer resources skills training and development?
 - Collaborate with technology providers to create an open source tool
-

INTRODUCTION

Campaigning has been taking place in the UK for centuries. Some of the landmark changes in history - the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, equal marriage - have all come about because of campaigns rooted in a deep public desire to change society for the better.

In the digital age, campaigning has moved into the online world. Over the past 11 years we have seen the rise of some of the UK's biggest petitioning platforms such as Change.org and 38 Degrees. Charities have made a shift towards using digital in their campaigns. And Parliament responded to this shift by creating their own petitioning platform in 2006³.

The rise of technology has enabled campaigning to take up a whole new space. Petitions and videos can go viral. Rather than 100 people signing a petition with their pens, an online petition can gain reach one million signatures within hours. Postcard campaigns have been replaced by email campaigns. Phoning your MP campaigns have been replaced by twitterstorms. And millions of people from across the world can add their voices to campaigns.

Over 39 million digital campaign actions have been taken on 38 Degrees' platform. The number of members on Change.org's site grows by two million each month⁴. On the government's own petition platform there were 6.4 million signatures in its first year of running.

Traditionally, the lead in initiating and organising campaigns has been taken by charities and other larger organisations. But in our work both within this project and as a consultancy, we have noticed a rise in volunteer-led campaigns and individual-led campaigns. Now, some of the most popular and viral digital campaigns are ones that were initiated by individuals rather than organisations⁵.

This shift introduces an interesting dynamic within digital campaigning. The rise of technology has enabled innovation within the charity sector and the creation of a new digital campaigning sector. Yet it has also shifted the idea of who campaigning is for and who can take ownership over campaigns.

These changes impact most crucially those with the lived experience. Those with lived experience of an issue are the very people that should benefit hugely from the rise of digital. Their voices can be amplified through the multitude of channels. Their demands can be seen by those in power. And they can be their own agents of change. But right now, these voices of lived experience are being overshadowed by the sheer volume of voices that digital campaigning permits.

Esther Foreman's report *Shouting Down the House* (2013) found that new methods of online campaigning, such as 'email your MP' tactics were drowning out some of the most marginalised people⁶. Foreman writes: "The social media noise levels created by mass digital email campaigns have hidden the legitimate voices who are speaking truth to power". She recommended the charity sector innovated around digital campaigning to make space for these voices, building on the conclusions of her previous research *Peering In* (2011) in which she explored the impact of evolving communication models and growing public expectation of the House of Lords. Foreman found that Peers did not have adequate tools to manage new online communication tactics from campaigners.

This project focuses primarily on campaigns that seek to achieve legislative change within the UK, with the decision maker of the campaign being MPs. We appreciate that there are a myriad of types of campaigning that use digital tactics to influence decision makers, we think the principles of centring the voices of lived experience is key to all of them.

The Lost Voices project builds on the work contained in those two reports. Moving from analysis to innovation, we have gathered evidence and built a tool that will help charities interrogate their digital campaigning practices. This evidence-based framework is intended to provide strategic support to organisations who wish to test out new models of digital campaigning. It centres the voices of those with lived experience and offers recommendations for how to best integrate these voices into the heart of digital campaigns.

METHODOLOGY

The research undertaken was mixed-method, using a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods including: desk research; semi-structured interviews with digital leads in the charity sector, technology providers, MPs and those with lived experience; a survey of the NGO sector; and a hackathon with the digital campaigning sector.

Charity interviews took place between July and November 2017 with the following organisations: Amnesty; Friends of the Earth; Parkinsons UK; The Children's Society; Crisis; Generation Rent; NDCS; Oxfam; Scope; Refugee Action; Mencap; ShareAction; Stop Funding Hate; Women's Aid; RECLAIM.

Interviews with tech providers took place between July and November 2017. Participants included: 38 Degrees; Change.org; MoreOnion; Action Network; Care2; Tweet your MP; Reason Digital.

This project came in during a turbulent political time for the UK. In between Brexit in 2016 and the "snap election" in 2017 there was much political uncertainty. This meant our ability to delve into the political sector was somewhat restricted. We were only able to reach out to MPs once the new MPs had come into office in 2017 and interviews took place between July 2017 and February 2018. The following were interviewed: Charles Walker, Conservative MP; Meg Hillier, Labour MP; Damian Green, Conservative MP; Ben Soffa, Labour MP; Bim Afolami, Conservative MP; Ian McKenzie, Labour MP; Nicolas Layden, Chief of Staff, Conservative MSP.

Interviews with those with lived experience took place between July 2017 and March 2018 and consisted of individuals connected in with the following organisations: Global Disability Innovation Hub; Involve ; RNIB; Sour Lemons; Expert Link.

The roundtable with charity leads took place in December 2017 with over 100 sign-ups from charities such as Amnesty, Friends of the Earth, Agenda, Anthony Nolan Trust, and many more.

The online survey was launched in July 2017 and ran for around eight weeks. It aimed to assess the experiences of digital campaigning in organisations of varying size, focusing on areas like resource, capacity and digital campaigning methods. It was distributed through a number of networks, such as Ecampaigning Forum email list, New Economics Organisers Network email list, Women in Campaigns group, The Social Change Agency's newsletter, People of Colour in Campaigns group and LinkedIn. In total 20 organisations filled in the survey. The organisations varied in size, with turnovers ranging from £600,000 to £29 million.

We have facilitated a workshop with Amnesty UK and Amnesty International around ways to implement the findings of the Lost Voices project into their campaigning strategy. We are also working with NSPCC on the implications of the Lost Voices project for campaigning around children and families affected by child abuse.

THE PROBLEM

Digital campaigning, consisting predominantly of petitions and email-to-target actions, is extolled by many charities as the 'first step on the road to democratic participation.' However, it is clear from the research that the current way digital campaigning is being approached is leading to an erosion of trust - both on the part of participants and of decision-makers.

First, doubts are being expressed about the underlying motive of charities and petition providers in asking people to add their signatures to campaigns. As campaigner Caroline Criado Perez said at [ORGCon, 2017](#), "*petitions are about data capture.*" The lack of transparency about how that data will be used has led to participants feeling uneasy about handing over their support in the form of an email. This can be felt strongly in the words of Clay Johnson, former strategist for Barack Obama who stated back in 2010: "*Nearly every organization...is focused on one thing - inventing new and interesting ways to get your email address. And they want your email address so that they can ask you for money.*"⁷ Concerns about the way data will be used help to fuel doubts about the integrity of e-campaigning, or "clicktivism" as the debate often terms it.

A similar - albeit slightly different - doubt about charities' underlying motives is expressed by those who are the object of the campaigns: the decision-makers. For them, charities appear to use e-campaigning not because they think it is effective but to shore up their reputation in the eyes of their supporters. In an interview, one MP expressed the views that: "*charities do digital lobbying because they want to tell their members they're doing things. There's no causal link. It's dangerous because you're giving people a feeling that they can influence when they can't. They do it to keep their supporters happy.*"

Second, there are doubts about the extent to which mass emails and signatures absolutely represent real individuals or are grounded in real experience. Such claims, particularly on the part of decision-makers, are not uncommon: similar doubts were expressed about the veracity of some of the six million signatures on the 1848 Charter calling for universal voting rights. MPs to whom we spoke also raised concerns about how many of the emails they received were

generated by real people or expressed real feelings; some told us that they could easily identify that some emails were generated from standard charity templates to which personal names had been added. As Esther Foreman told the 1922 committee in evidence on 2016: *“Most MPs present believed that charity petitions and emails contained a large part of emails generated by robots. And they’re responding accordingly, with email filter systems and automated responses. Soon, we’ll be in a situation where it’s robots talking to robots.”*

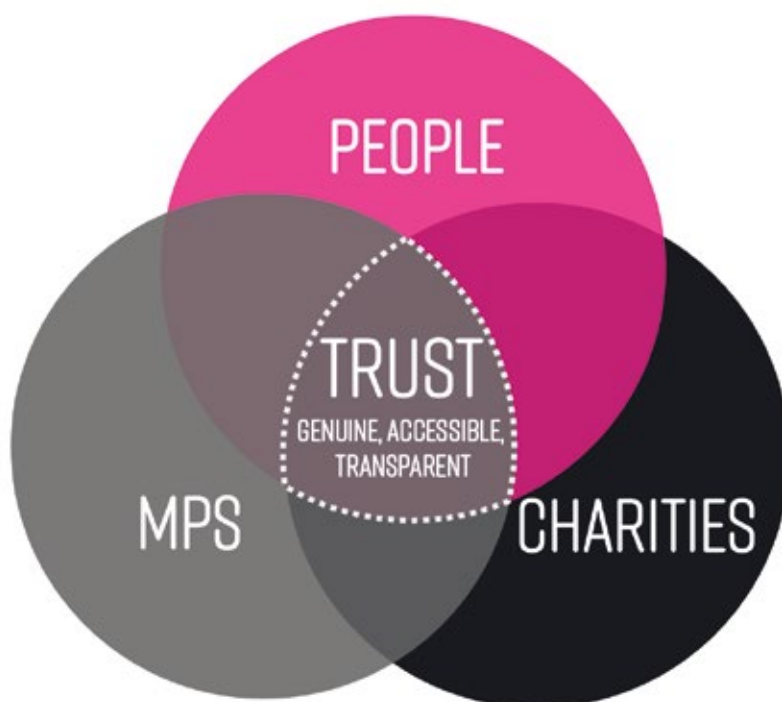
Even if decision-makers recognise that those contacting them are human, they do not always regard them as individuals whose views matter to them, or issues with which they should be concerned. Perhaps understandably, some of the politicians we met took a somewhat limited view of their role: if the individual contacting them was not a constituent, or the issue was not one which mattered to them or one they could influence, they were not inclined to respond positively to the contact. The campaigning efforts were therefore, at best, responded to with a polite proforma answer or, at worst, ignored.

The general mistrust around digital campaigning also extends to the charities themselves. Charities recognise that they are increasingly mistrusted by MPs and a growing section of the public; but they too express mistrust of both sectors. One representative from a charity interviewed for the project suggested we take what MP’s say with *“a pinch of salt.”* Similarly, many charities interviewed, knowing how uncertain their relationships already are with politicians, admitted the difficulty they face in trusting their beneficiaries to take ownership of their campaigns.

It is those with lived experience who most suffer as a result of this mistrust. They are the individuals to whom the issues most matter. They are the ones whose stories are most likely to influence decision-makers. But rather than being at the forefront of the campaigns, they are relegated to watching from the sidelines. And if they are encouraged and enabled to participate, all too often their campaigning efforts are not met with the success they sought (or had been promised) but with, at best, a proforma response from their local MP. Not only are they left with their issue unresolved; they also are forced to conclude that campaigning is not an effective way for them to speak truth to power.



How charities, MPs and the public **are currently** working together



How charities, MPs and the public **should** be working together

THE VALUE OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

Key Points

- Digital campaigning is a powerful vehicle for those with the lived experience to access power, yet our research has shown that the current use of digital in mass campaigning is not tailored for this purpose.
- Those with lived experience are often treated as “case studies” or “informants” rather than change makers.
- Larger organisations struggle to segment their online base of supporters to give tailored action to those with lived experience.
- Recommendations include building those with lived experience into leadership positions, alleviating the barriers to participation and having regular contact with those with lived experience.

We have approached this project with the commitment to centre the voices of lived experience. We are defining ‘lived experience’ in the same manner that Baljeet Sandhu does in her report *The Value of the Lived Experience in Social Change*. Sandhu describes the lived experience as: *“the experience(s) of people on whom a social issue, or a combination of issues, has had a direct personal impact”*. Sandhu’s report concluded that *“experts by experience”* - people who use their personal experience of disadvantage to drive change - need to be *“meaningfully and equitably involved in social purpose work.”*⁸

It was unanimously agreed in our interviews and discussions that there was great value in including the voices of lived experience in digital campaigning. In our conversations with decision makers it was clear that these voices were some of the most impactful.

Frank Field, Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee highlighted the impact a barrage of emails from those with lived experience had in an inquiry into disability benefits. What’s interesting, however, is the distinction he made between the emails from the lived experience, and generic campaign emails:

*“We expected to get about 100 letters and we have had over 3,000 and they are still coming in although it is after the date. We’ve never had a tidal wave like this. None of these are campaign letters, which we have discounted. We have only kept those from people who have spent huge time and effort to portray the misery of what has resulted for them.”*⁹

Other decision makers echoed this sentiment:

“E-campaigns are all just done by the same people.”

“Of course, I know the people who send me personal, direct emails. I have a relationship with them now.”

“The best type of communication I receive by people is one that is personalised and that is local and specific.”

There has also been a shift towards a recognition of the deep value that those with lived experience have in creating change, especially in digital campaigns. We can see this through the many reports published around improving digital campaigning tactics, many of which cite ‘make your emails more personalised’ and ‘increase face to face interaction’ as ways to increase the success of a digital campaign.

“Are there supporters who are directly affected by your issue or whose voice might stand out to MPs?”¹⁰

However, while charities recognise the value of lived experience in speaking to power, Sandhu’s report highlighted the gap between this belief and the way that many charities take action around lived experience: namely, that those with lived experience are treated as “informants” rather than “change makers”¹¹.

This gap was very clear from our research. In our interviews with those with lived experience, the overwhelming feeling was that larger charities treated them as case studies rather than as active participants in the campaigning process:

“I hate the term case studies. When we ask for case studies, we’re asking for people to verify what we already think. Whereas if you genuinely want to listen to the lived experience, then that requires communication and direct experience.”

“We need to start seeing those with lived experience as partners rather than subjects.”

Often, those who are directly affected by the issues organisations campaign on feel added onto a campaign as an afterthought. Our interviews with charities confirmed that impression. One charity Campaign Engagement Manager spoke about their limitations when it comes to involving those with lived experience (in this case, their beneficiaries):

“For every action, we ask people whether or not they’re affected by the condition, and that goes into the email that they send to target, but we’re not doing anything with it. And I’m pretty sure there are no reports that are recording it.”

That does not have to be the case: some organisations ensure those with the lived experience are at the heart of all that they do. One of the charities researched was RECLAIM, a youth charity based in Manchester. Supporting young people to voice the lived experience permeates every aspect of RECLAIM's work: from helping them write blogs and run social media campaigns to training them to become spokespeople for the organisation. As RECLAIM says: *"Our young people speak confidently for themselves, in their own words, not as token."* Involving young people in a genuine and meaningful way has resulted in campaigns wholly shaped by those who experience the issues at hand. RECLAIM campaigns have informed strategies for public services, fed into public consultations, and provided young people in Manchester the opportunity to speak directly to London decision makers.

RECLAIM seems unusual in employing a structured approach to empowering those with lived experience to participate in the full range of campaigning experiences. Larger charities often design and launch campaigns before considering how, if at all, to involve those with lived experience. Even when they do seek to identify such individuals within their supporter bases, their systems are ill-equipped to identify them, let alone provide them with a tailored pathway to contribute to the campaign in a way which both recognises their unique commitment to its outcome and the particular contribution they can make in engaging decision-makers.

Nor do campaigners always recognise the barriers faced by people with lived experience to fully participation. At the hackathon we hosted in December 2017, keynote speaker Rebecca Bunce argued that *"you can be powerful and powerless in the same breath"* and highlighted that civil society has created digital spaces that replicate the barriers found in the real world: *"In our rush to make use of digital tools, all too often civil society is forgetting to shape them."*

This sentiment arose in many conversations we had with those with lived experience:

"E-campaign actions don't feel like they're for those with the lived experience. They feel like they're for educated people. For those who aren't used to it, it feels like a lot of faff."

"When you feel like things have to be interpreted for you, then you know it's not really for you."

There are some obvious clear barriers to participation for those with lived experience. Access to computers or smartphones, knowledge of IT and literacy can be problematic. Some organisations actively work to overcome these: Women for Refugee Women set up IT classes for refugee women to come and write their first emails to their MPs together.

However, more profound changes are necessary if the lived experience is to be put at the heart of digital campaigning. That requires charities and organisations truly to analyse their audiences and their supporters, and take steps to increase the diversity of their membership base using a diverse range of tools. Rebuilding trust and increasing campaigning effectiveness means creating tailored journeys, alumni schemes and leadership programmes for people with lived experience, and deploying them in ways which balance mass engagement with personal story-telling.

This is a difficult task indeed – but one which the project has sought to explore. On the basis of our research, we have formulated some key recommendations to allow stakeholders to examine their own processes with the voices of lived experience in mind.

BEST PRACTICE IN DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING

Key Points

- Digital campaigning is loved because it is easy, inclusive, far reaching and connective.
- Many digital campaign metrics of success are geared towards scalability rather than impact.
- Charities have the knowledge and resources to assist in improving the direct relationship a decision maker has with the lived experience or those who support a campaign.
- Public affairs teams have a responsibility to ensure that they are collaborating with the digital campaigns team to bring the voices of lived experience into the heart of the campaign, but also in front of the decision makers.
- There is a stark contrast in innovation capacity between the larger organisations and those with fewer resources.
- Recommendations include creating alternative KPI models, creating an integrated communications plan, ensuring the public affairs team include the lived experience, and fostering an atmosphere of collaboration across organisations.

Having identified the issues, the research then turned to suggesting key principles which should guide improvements in digital campaigning in order to enable the voices of those with lived experience to be heard more powerfully. We have codified these as follows:

Campaign design

Our research indicates that successful digital campaigns have to be:

- **Easy** - Digital campaigning is easy. It's cheap, it doesn't require much resource, and within minutes you can reach hundreds of thousands of people. We know that in any future digital campaigning innovation, ease is key - for both the digital team to use the tech, but also for those that will be using the front end.

- **Inclusive** - Unlike older forms of campaigning (such as protesting), digital campaigns allow participation from those unable (or unwilling) to leave their own homes or to stand out from the crowd. Good digital campaigns do not require swathes of knowledge or resource. They have a low barrier to entry. However, it is important to remember that barriers remain, especially for some of those with lived experience. The low bar for entry also allows decision-makers to question the intensity of claimed campaign support.
- **Connective** - Digital campaigning has the potential to connect communities and create networks at scale. Digital allows for people who are otherwise isolated to connect with each other - just look at the role of Twitter in connecting activists across the world. It provides the space for collective idea generation, with the input of a multitude of voices.

These elements are fundamental to the best practice of digital campaigning. However, these must be kept in balance. For example, a mass emailing campaign directed at an existing supporter base may be incredibly easy, but may not be very connective or far reaching.

These elements will form the core of the framework at the end of this report.

Success metrics

A good campaign must set clear metrics by which success will be measured. However, our research indicated that some of the success measures or Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used in digital campaigning are not helpful. In particular, the metrics of success used in many campaigns are geared towards scalability rather than impact. Almost all charities interviewed cited numbers of those taking action as the key factor that determined the success of their campaign. And yet, many also acknowledged the limitations of using numbers. One campaigner admitted that many of their metrics are 'plucked out of thin air'. And as one campaigner said: *"It's important not to just focus on the number of actions taken, but also look at their impact."*

This focus on numbers is not helpful. Mass action has its place and undoubtedly can be useful. But it is clear from our interviews with decision-makers that they are often impressed more by a smaller number of tailored, specific communications from constituents or others whose views matter to them than they are to mass emails or claimed petition numbers. The sheer volume of emails or tweets to decision makers can leave them too overwhelmed to deal with each one. Some have even refused to interact at all with these types of campaigns. The result has a negative impact on the public and those with lived experience, who feel let down by a promise that they could create change through this tactic. There is also a danger that the

timing of campaigns is determined more by an opportunity to build a mass campaigner base than achieve an outcome, and that the ask is framed more in order to build popular support than to engage the decision-maker in making a policy change.

Moving away from a metric based on participant numbers can open up the possibility of creating more integrated, tailored and powerful campaigns. This requires a comprehensive framework which takes into account the overall goals of the organisations, and key indicators that help pinpoint what success looks like. It includes things like feedback from key targets, building relationships with those most directly affected, and facilitating supporters to become change-makers. There are a number of evaluation frameworks which are beginning to be used which embody these principles¹². Charities - and their funders - need to consider whether such frameworks would improve both their campaigning and their relationships with those with lived experience.

The sorts of steps involved are suggested below:

Charities could:

- Create a tailored evaluation framework that takes into account the overall goal of the organisation and the role of the specific digital campaign in creating social change.
- Work across teams to create a standardised evaluation framework that can be moulded to different teams within the organisation. This will allow for a mutual understanding across the organisation of the strategic goals for social change.
- Test the effectiveness of digital campaign actions by including in the evaluation framework a chance to speak to the decision makers affected. This will not only help to build a relationship with decision makers, but it will offer another prism through which to analyse the success of a campaigning tactic.

Funders could:

- Make a shift towards recognising the many ways that social change can be tracked. This could be done by them setting the terms of the evaluation through alternative evaluation models.
- Think of alternative structures of funding which allow for more flexibility in the outcomes of grants but which also allow for the desired outcomes that funding.

Building relationships with decision makers

A key element of best practice in any campaigning is the relationship between the campaigners and the decision-makers. This is no less important in digital campaigning than in other sorts of campaigning; indeed, the fact that digital campaigning can be run without any such relationship is one of the reasons that its rise has coincided with a mutual erosion of trust. Good campaigns therefore encourage relationship building, both between charities and decision-makers and between those with lived experience and decision makers.

A number of decision makers we spoke with pointed to their direct relationships with those with lived experience as examples of successful lobbying.

“If I know that they’re a constituent and I’ve spoken to them before, so I’m much more likely to listen to them.”

“I like to build up dialogue with my constituents.”

This aspiration is a positive one and we spoke to a number of decision makers who clearly valued their relationships with constituents. However, it was also clear that while some voices of those with lived experience were being heard, some were not. Parliament and MP offices must also innovate if they would like to listen to a wide range of the voices of lived experience and understand better the issues which affect the lives of all their constituents. Systems must be put in place so that a relationship can be developed with any constituent that raises a concern.

Charities have the knowledge and resources to assist in improving the direct relationship a decision maker has with those with lived experience. Helping a decision maker to develop relationships with those with lived experience through digital is a powerful way to enact change. As we have seen, this is not where much of the sector currently is. Based on our research, we suggest that charities should:

- Examine and segment their supporter bases to identify those with lived experience and ensure that where appropriate they are given a unique user journey to participate in and help shape the campaign.
- Require digital campaigning teams to include in its communications plan methods to cultivate relationships between decision makers and supporters of campaigns.
- Assess each of their campaigns to find a route to a personal phone call or face to face meeting with the decision maker.

- Where appropriate, review their technology to find ways of enabling decision maker can identify a particular supporter as constituent (is this something that charities could collaborate across organisations to develop and make open source?).

If charities are to be successful intermediaries between decision-makers and those with lived experience, they themselves have to have strong relationships with the political class. While many of the recommendations in this report are focused on ensuring that these lived experience is more central to digital campaigning, there is also some work to be done on repairing charities' relationships with decision-makers.

The research indicated that structural issues in charities have fed into the erosion of trust between the parties over the past few years, with digital campaigning being run separately from public affairs. Many digital campaigners we spoke to did not keep a record of the MPs they had contacted, the responses they received, or the number of times each MP had been contacted. MPs complained to us of receiving a what they view as hundreds of "spam" or "pointless" emails from charities, and were highly critical of the charities concerned. For such MPs, there was a significant disparity between their contact with the public affairs staff of the charities and their experience of digital campaigning.

For public affairs teams, as for digital campaign teams, having contact with people with lived experience represents a real opportunity. As one person in the lived experience space puts it:

"To the guys on the ground, we as the intermediaries do a bit of translation. It's about trying to meet the language. But charities and MPs need to meet halfway. And this halfway point looks like having lived experience in the campaigns team, have campaign leads with lived experience, and having someone with lived experience join the policy officer to meet the decision maker."

On that basis, we recommend the following should be considered:

- Public affairs teams should include someone with lived experience. If a member of staff is meeting a decision maker, ensure the voice of the lived experience is present and nurtured.
- Test out building new digital relationships with decision makers.
- Keep a profile of decision makers and their interaction with the organisation. This way each communication can be more tailored to the decision maker.
- Learn from how other departments treat their key targets. Is there anything the digital campaigns team could learn from the fundraising team about stakeholder management?

Collaboration

One key finding from our research was the stark contrast in capacity between the larger organisations and those with fewer resources. Some of the most damaging digital campaigning tactics (such as mass emailing to all MPs with unfocused asks) are pursued by the smaller charities that do not have the digital skills, resource or capacity to create more tailored, focussed campaigns.

Collaboration is therefore key to improvement. Collaborating with organisations of varying sizes can streamline a digital campaign and thus improve its effectiveness and it is through collaboration that campaigns turn into movements.

A fantastic example of this level of collaboration is Women for Refugee Women, who collaborated with a mixture of 40 organisations for their #AllWomenCount campaign on 8 March 2018. This campaign aims to give refugee women the space to speak for themselves, in front of decision makers. Taking place on International Women's Day, Women for Refugee Women brought together MPs, refugee women, and 40 different organisations to stand for the safety, dignity and liberty of refugee women.

This level of collaboration is difficult. Managing expectations, requirements and deliverables from such huge organisations certainly comes with challenges. However, it is with this level of decentralised organisation that the voices of lived experience can be at the heart of a campaign.

In order to improve collaboration, charities could:

- Team up with other organisations to create a collaborative event with a mutual aim, thus helping to build partnerships and relationships with partners in the sector.
- (for organisations with more resources and capacity) offer skills training and development or mentorship to an organisation with fewer resources.
- Collaborate with technology providers to create an open source tool such as a tool to allow for a recording of MP email and responses and share across the sector.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT IN DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING

Key Points

- Key element of bad practice include: showering decision makers with unpersonalised emails, giving unfocused asks and misleading supporters.
- There is a clear lack of trust between those with lived experience and the charities that aim to help represent them.
- Silos between teams mean that it is much more difficult to run effective digital campaigning.
- The role of email is limited.
- Recommendations include: bringing the lived experience into the heart of decision making processes of a campaign, training all teams with basic digital skills.

There are some key elements that are widely agreed upon by our research cohort as basic bad practice in digital campaigning:

- **Showering decision makers with unpersonalised emails:** Our research revealed that sending mass, unpersonalised emails to decision makers is rarely successful, and often has dangerous repercussions. Decision makers often don't believe that those who have sent the email really care about the issue at hand. Their relationship with the charities involved is called into question, and ultimately the emails from those with lived experience risk getting lost in the pile of non-personal emails.
- **Making unfocused or inappropriate asks:** In our discussions with decision makers and charities, it was abundantly clear that the least valued types of e-campaigns were those that did not adequately assess the role of the decision maker in influencing the outcome sought. Often, emails were sent out to MPs who had no role in making a decision over a policy, or they were sent too late after the bill was already due to become legislation. A responsible digital campaign will ensure that the target is correct, and that the ask is reasonably within their power to do.

- **Misleading supporters:** Digital campaigning works most effectively when charities are open with supporters about their role in creating change. Often, e-campaigning actions are accompanied by a frenzied tale that a supporter's action will 'tip the balance' to change a decision maker's mind. This misleads supporters and particularly discourages first-time campaigners from taking repeat actions. In order to rebuild the trust between charities and supporters, e-campaign actions should not try to offer false promises to supporters.

Playing lip service to the voices of lived experience

In our interviews with those with lived experience, there was a feeling that larger charities do no more than pay lip service to the voice of those with lived experience. It was strongly believed that the lived experience played little or no role in digital campaigns.

"The communication departments only want case studies. How many people in the digital campaigns or communications team have even met someone with lived experience? And I don't mean walking past and talking to a homeless person in the street. I mean, spent real time with them? Maybe people within these teams should spent some time in the service delivery teams."

"If you've never spoken to someone with lived experience, how can you communicate that connection?"

Our interviews with larger organisations made it clear that there are genuine obstacles in centring campaigns around the voices of those with lived experience. For example, issues of safeguarding around young people mean it may be difficult to give those with lived experience the leadership position that is desired. Some charity staff felt it a breach of trust to keep a database with information about individuals' lived experience. However, these issues do not fully account for the clear lack of trust between those with lived experience and the charities that purport to represent them.

NCVO and Bond's report *Good Guide to Campaigning and Influencing* offers a comprehensive guide to authentically including the voices of lived experience¹³. This includes democratic decision making with those with lived experience, consultation with those with lived experience, lived experience involvement on the governing body, supporting autonomous campaigns groups, speakers tours, public hearings and direct advocacy. The report also presents possible responses to reservations around this level of direct involvement of those with lived experience.

We suggest that charities should:

- Invite those with lived experience to the ideation phase of the digital campaign. Involve them in the research and demands, sourcing tactics and using tech.
- Create an online space or community to connect those with lived experience to each other. Provide the space for development and enrichment for those with lived experience.
- Ensure staff and the board within the organisation have a diverse range of experiences.
- Develop those with lived experience into leadership positions. Allow them to take ownership of a digital campaign, with support from the digital campaigning, comms and policy team. Curate apprenticeship and campaign ambassador programmes.

Organisational silos

A successful campaign requires a holistic approach, with the input of the research and policy team, the campaigning team, the digital campaigning team and the fundraising team. However, in many charities - especially the larger ones - these teams exist in silos. In many cases, each department isn't fully aware of the campaigns or tactics used by another department. And, crucially, the list of supporters, members and those with lived experience is shared between these teams.

These silos between teams mean that it is much more difficult to run effective digital campaigning. Online campaigning should complement offline campaigning, but the siloing of teams means that often supporters can receive multiple campaign asks in a single week. Decision makers are at the receiving end of a number of campaigns by the same organisation at the same time and don't know where to begin. And those with lived experience are lost in the process. One organisation admitted they are "blindfolded about [our] audience" as a result of this siloing and its impact on their databases.

In order for digital campaigning to be effective, it's important to share skills across all areas of the organisation. We suggest:

- Charities should look to train up the whole organisation with basic digital skills. This way, digital can form a core element of each campaign, and digital skills aren't restricted to one department.
- Training up other teams in the organisation provides the perfect opportunity also to train up those with lived experience in core digital skills. This will allow them to take ownership of campaigns and have decision making power over tools and tactics. It will also allow for a greater integration of the lived experience into the heart of the campaign teams.

- Seek outside influence. Charities should look at how other sectors collaborate to create innovative and powerful campaigns. Is there anything that can be transposed to your organisation?
- One way to ensure that ideas are solidified into strategy is to create a best-practice checklist within an organisation for key digital and campaigning elements that every campaign should have. Work on this with input from each department.

Overuse of email

Is it time to put down email? The feedback from our research clearly indicated that mass emailing was an outdated and damaging tactic. But it is still being used: one organisation interviewed commented that *“the current ways that we do digital campaigning is a bit regimented.”* Another campaigner said that while *“I don’t believe much in email anymore”, “we’ve fallen a little bit into doing things for the sake of doing things.”*

One campaigner who also ran to become an MP said in an interview *“MPs have automated messages in accordance to which inbox they are filtered into...responding to people’s automatically generated emails comes to the bottom of the pile of MP’s things to do.”*

The research revealed that, despite these acknowledgements and regardless of the size of the organisation, email is still the central tool to campaigning.

As part of the hackathon, we explored what alternate uses of technology could create the same positive impact as email. Some of the suggestions that came up, were:



Using Twitter to run Q&A’s with MPs



Creating unique video signatures to petitions



Create a tagging system to build campaigner profiles



Creating virtual MP surgeries where we could create an augmented reality approach to campaigning



Create multiple choice responses for MPs

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS

Key Points

- We believe that technology platforms are responsible for pushing the boundaries of campaigning as well as serving market need.
- Technology is a facilitator rather than an enabler of change.
- Recommendations include: technology providers collaborating with larger organisations to create open source tools and making tools more affordable and accessible.

The technology providers are key to the system of digital campaigning. We spoke to some of the largest technology providers spanning the UK, Europe and the US.

While most technology providers understood the need for campaigning to move away from email, they all also recognised that their tools were based primarily on email due to market demand. We believe that technology platforms are responsible for pushing the boundaries of campaigning as well as serving market need. Right now, it seems that technology providers are skewed towards the latter.

However, it is clear that there is a deep understanding of the digital campaigning system from the technology providers. [Brian Young](#), CEO of [Action Network](#) commented on his understanding of the role of technology in campaigning:

“It’s about using technology to build communities in a way that is meaningful to the people in those communities, providing opportunities to leverage their collective power into political outcomes.”

Young recognised that technology is a facilitator rather than an enabler of change. Technology must be rooted within an agreed understanding of its role in creating change. Too often emails are the only piece of technology used in digital campaigning. This is most evident in smaller charities with little resource to innovate. We believe that it is the responsibility of bigger charities and technology providers in this space to co-invest in new campaigning products and to provide skills training, for the good of civil society.

Interestingly, two of the prominent technology providers interviewed pointed

towards an ideal future, which entailed local organising as meshed with mass mobilising. One technology provider said:

“The challenge with our technology at the moment is that it’s making it harder, not easier to organise locally. The issue with email based activity is that you need a critical mass to be effective...but we want to be able to build tools that are necessary for long term organising.”

We therefore suggest that technology providers:

- Collaborate with each other and/or with larger charities to create an open source tool for the sector.
- While continuing to service email-based activity, actively look to develop alternative campaigning tools.
- Work towards making organising tools more affordable and accessible. This could be through investing in partnerships, using crowdfunding to raise revenue and support for new products, sharing tool through open source.

CONCLUSION

E-campaigning is a powerful vehicle through which those with lived experience can use their voices to achieve social change.

However, digital campaigning right now is in a precarious position. The overuse of the same digital campaigning tactics have led to a desensitisation of these methods by decision makers. But, more than that, they have led to an active mistrust of the charity sector. On top of this, those with lived experience are tired of their experiences being commodified by the very charities trying to represent them. Charities need to innovate on their digital campaigning practices in a way that centres these voices of lived experience if we are to mend these layers of broken trust.

Our research took us into the heart of digital campaigning teams in a variety of charities - from some of the largest to some of the smallest. Comparing the skills, resource and capacity of the larger charities with the smaller was a stark reminder that collaboration across the sector is crucial. In an age of competition over funding, organisations that require cheap and easy campaigning tactics are resorting to some of the most dangerous ecampaigning tactics for democracy.

The hackathon we hosted in December was a brilliant coming together of all of the charity digital leads to work on this problem. The numbers, level of engagement and nuanced findings were all testament to the desire of the sector to shift its approach to digital campaigning.

We also welcome and would like to unpick the hesitations that many charities may feel around this topic. Questions have been raised about whether the lived experience is always the most important thing in a digital campaign, and whether this is over simplifying the multifaceted nature of campaigning. We recognise the myriad of ways to involve the voices of lived experience in wider campaigning tactics.

However, we identified that these voices were being lost in digital campaigns, which is - and will continue to be - a key form of communication between people and decision makers. Our conversations with numerous people within the lived experience space highlighted a deep exasperation with the way the charity sector commodifies their experiences. This project aims to help organisations come up with practical tools to create more responsible - and more effective - digital campaigns.

We also recognise that many of our recommendations extend far beyond the realms of digital campaigning and call into question themes such as governance, organisational structure and funding restrictions. It is impossible to analyse an

aspect of the charity sector without highlighting some of the key systems that underpin it.

Importantly, we do not think innovation of the digital campaigning sector only falls on the shoulders of the charity sector. This research has revealed the deep necessity for MP offices to improve if there is to be any mutual rebuilding of trust. Many MPs we spoke to felt that e-campaigning was a 'broken' tool. It's imperative that MP offices come to the innovation table with the same openness and willingness to be interrogative as the charity sector has done.

Below are a list of recommendations for all of the key players in the digital campaigning space; the charity sector, decision makers, technology providers and the lived experience.

Charity sector

When innovating on a digital campaigning tactic, ensure that any new idea has the core elements of easy, inclusive, connective and far reaching

- Use the Lost Voices toolkit to run refine the proposed initiative

Charities should work towards centering the voices of lived experience at the heart of their digital campaigning

- Develop meaningful and equitable
- opportunities for those with lived experience into leadership positions through support, training, ambassador work, apprenticeships and paid work

Charities should ensure that their work is meaningfully informed by the knowledge and voices of those with lived experience to rebuild trust with decision makers (and their beneficiaries)

- If a member of staff is meeting a decision maker, ensure the voice of the lived experience is present, respected and nurtured

Charities should use their knowledge and resources to support and improve the direct relationship a decision maker has with those with lived experience or those who support a campaign

- Create an integrated communications plan to meaningfully include voices of lived experience
- Segment supporters and give those with lived experience a unique user journey
- Create more sophisticated technology to allow for a decision maker to identify a supporter or someone with lived experience

In order for digital campaigning to stay innovative, it's important to share skills across all areas of the organisation

- Train up teams within organisation in basic digital skills
- Seek outside influence. Is there anything from outside sectors that can be transposed to the organisation?
- Create a best-practice checklist within the organisation

Collaborating with organisations of varying sizes can streamline a digital campaign and thus improve its effectiveness. It's through collaboration that campaigns turn into movements

- Team up with other organisations to create a collaborative event
- If you are an organisation with more resources and capacity, can you go into an organisation with fewer resources and offer skills training and development?
- Collaborate with technology providers to create an open source tool

Decision makers

- We suggest that Parliament invests in training to constituency and MP offices to help raise an awareness of digital campaigning and communication, the role of lived experience, and the rise of new forms of campaigning. This training could be given as an induction to all new MPs and MP staff.

Technology providers

- We suggest that technology providers collaborate with each other and/or with larger charities to create an open source tool for the sector.
- While email has its place within campaigning, there are a huge range of tools outside of email that technology providers could innovate on. There is a possibility to segment the company's time between meeting the market demand and innovating on new products.
- Work towards making organising tools more affordable and accessible. This could be through partnerships, crowdfunding, open source etc.

Funders

- Funders must make a shift towards recognising the many ways that social change can be tracked. This could be done by them setting the terms of the evaluation through alternative evaluation models.
- Funders should work alongside. They should build relationships with grantees and view grantees as partners rather than subjects
- Funders should encourage the use of outcome focused success metrics rather than only numeric targets.

APPENDICES

Resources

Sample questions used in interviews
List of charities, MPs, lived experience
and technology providers interviewed
Lost Voices survey to charity sector
Lost Voices survey to lived experience

RESOURCES

Acevo, *Speaking Frankly, Acting Boldly: the legacy and achievements of charity campaigning* (2017)

Foreman, E *Shouting Down the House* (2013)

Foreman, E *Peering In* (2011)

Sandhu, B *The Value of the Lived Experience in Social Change* (2017)

MoreOnion *Pushing the boundaries of MP actions in Engaging Networks* (2017)

NCVO *Getting Involved: how people make a difference* (2017)

Lamb, B *Good Guide to Campaigning and Influencing*

Hansard Society, *Audit of Political Engagement* (2017)

FairSay *UK MP Survey* (2006)

Han, H *How organisations develop activists* (2014)

The Atlantic, *Your Online Petition is Useless* (2010)

The Guardian, *Inquiry into disability benefits 'deluged' by tales of despair* (2017)

SAMPLE QUESTIONS USED IN INTERVIEWS

Interviews with charity sector

1. What is the role of digital campaigning in reaching the goals of your organisation?
2. How do you measure success with digital campaigning?
3. How do you see digital campaigning as building relationships with your supporters?
4. Who is your crowd online?
5. What are the biggest challenges that face you going forward?

Interviews with MPs

1. What does the digital relationship between individual MPs and their constituents look like?
2. Describe a time when you have felt very influenced by a constituent. Was it online or in person? What was the issue?
3. Do you think your tools are sufficient in enabling you to respond to your constituents?
4. Ideally, how would you want charities that send mass emails to work with MPs?
5. What do you see as the future of MP-constituent relations in the next 10 years?

Interviews with technology providers

1. What feature of your tool are you most proud of?
2. What has been your biggest achievement to date?
3. Are there things you want to do but are stunted atm?
4. Where would you place yourselves within the wider system of digital democracy?
5. In 10 years time, how would you like to see digital campaigning being done and where do you see digital tools that you create fitting into it?

Questions for lived experience

1. What avenues for representation through digital are there for you/those that you work with?
2. What digital democratic engagement do you do with those that you work with?
3. Do those that you work with feel listened to through their digital actions? How do you know? (system of evaluation?) If yes - what conditions allow this to happen? If no - why? What could be done better?
4. What do you think is uniquely powerful about having those with lived experience speak to power, particularly through digital?
5. How do traditional e-campaigns take into account those with the lived experience?

CHARITIES, MPS, LIVED EXPERIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS INTERVIEWED

Charities

- Sam Strudwick, Amnesty UK
- Anastasia French, The Children's Society
- Tom Say, Crisis
- Ian Goggin, Friends of the Earth
- Ian Sullivan and Amy Hill, Oxfam
- Dan Wilson Craw, Generation Rent
- Sarah Scott, Harrow Mencap
- Emily Vickers, RECLAIM
- Catherine Joyce, Refugee Action
- Ceri Smith, Scope
- Jessica Reeves, NDCS
- Benali Hamdache, Parkinsons UK
- Colette St-Onge, ShareAction
- Rosey Ellum, Stop Funding Hate
- Hannah Atkinson and Laura Dix, Women's Aid

MPs

- Charles Walker, Conservative
- Meg Hillier, Labour
- Damian Green, Conservative
- Ben Soffa, Labour
- Bim Afolami, Conservative
- Ian McKenzie, CLP Chair and former Labour Government Special Adviser
- Nicolas Layden, Chief of Staff, Conservative MSP

Lived experience

- David Ford, Expert Link
- Rosemary Frazer, Global Disability Innovation Hub
- Eleanor Southwood, RNIB,
- Sade Banks-Brown, Sour Lemons

Technology providers

- Randy Paynter, Care2
- Amy Lockwood, 38 Degrees
- Pascale Frazer-Carroll, Change.org
- Brian Young, Action Network
- Florian Engel, CampaignOnion
- Jo Wolfe, Reason Digital
- Pete Taylor, Tweet your MP

END NOTES

¹Foreman, E *Peering In* (2011) available on: thesocialchangeagency.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/peering-in.pdf

²Foreman, E *Shouting Down the House* (2013) available on: thesocialchangeagency.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/shouting-down-the-house.pdf

³BBC News, *Are Petitions a waste of time?* (2015)

⁴NCVO *Getting Involved: how people make a difference* (2017)

⁵Ibid.

⁶Foreman, E *Shouting Down the House* (2013) available on: thesocialchangeagency.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/shouting-down-the-house.pdf

⁷Your Online Petition is Useless, *The Atlantic*: www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/08/your-online-petition-is-useless/340316/

⁸Sandhu, B *The Value of the Lived Experience in Social Change* (2017)

⁹The Guardian, *Inquiry into disability benefits 'deluged' by tales of despair* (2017)

¹⁰MoreOnoin *Pushing the boundaries of MP actions* (2017)

¹¹Sandhu, B *The Value of the Lived Experience in Social Change* (2017) p22

¹²For examples and case studies of alternative KPI toolkits take a look at thesocialchangeagency.org/lost-voices-report-3-metrics-working/

¹³Lamb, B *Good Guide to Campaigning and Influencing* (2011) p43

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LOST VOICES.

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