

Embracing the network: How to build a powerfully collaborative campaign



An engagement network is a community of people and/or organizations connected by a common purpose, and distributed in both in leadership and infrastructure. It's dynamic, decentralized, and inclusive to amplify engagement. Most importantly, a network can scale the best ideas faster, maintain high commitment, and do a better job of retaining and recruiting people for the long-term than an individual organization could.

As detailed in the Full Spectrum Engagement framework, “Embracing Networks” in campaigns can lead to powerful results. Many of the largest campaigns in the world, mobilizing millions of people, use the power of networks. It's easier than ever to embrace networked campaigning thanks to new technologies that have come on-stream in recent years.

Why is this important? Hierarchical organizations alone aren't getting it done. Networks that truly distribute leadership among partnered organizations are able to innovate faster and scale effective programming or messaging across the larger group. Look at growing networks much like you would think about growing and engaging a general campaign community. If you break it down, campaign networks of allied organizations are really just a segment of your community – a really powerful segment with incredible reach!

Successfully harnessing the power of networks comes from meeting your collaborators where they are, giving them meaningful actions to take based on their unique attributes, and efficiently tapping into the shared resources your network can bring to the table.



Here's how to get a campaigning network started:



STEP 1:

Set out a general objective for your campaign in simple terms.

For example, at the time of this writing many civil society organizations and web businesses were campaigning to stop Internet censorship powers in EU legal provisions known as Article 13 and Article 11.



STEP 2:

Decide on the type of network you want to create from the list below:

- A. *Shared rapid response campaign*: A quick unity statement and online action on a time-sensitive campaign inflection point. If the collaboration goes on beyond a couple months it becomes a networked campaign.
 - B. *Networked campaign*: An ongoing collaborative project such as SaveTheLink.org. This usually involves laying out a quarterly work plan, and is often focused on an issue rather than a specific piece of legislation.
 - C. *Brain trusts*: These are collaborative networks of organizations, businesses, advocates and experts who are working on a common work area or issue. The main difference here is that this network is not public facing and is focused on backend coordination and information sharing.
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STEP 3:

Write out a basic unity statement (recommended) or sign-on letter and core objectives of the campaign.

The unity statement should be brief and easy for groups to sign. The statement will often be turned into the initial petition statement on your campaign website. Here's an example of the unity statement from SaveTheLink.org: "Linking is the foundation of the Web. We oppose regulations that aim to censor links to content or otherwise penalize services that utilize hyperlinks."



STEP 4

Circulate the statement and the basic description of the campaign to a small group of high-profile organizations (3 or 4) and get buy-in.

These trusted collaborators will help hone the campaign and statement before you go out to a wider group. Note that you intend for the project to be a networked campaign and point collaborators to this document to learn more.



STEP 5:

Identify outreach targets and assign a staff member or collaborator to reach out to them.



STEP 6:

Now you're ready to create a basic pledge page ([like this one](#)) and reach out to networks to encourage other organizations to join the campaign

Try to get your initial group of collaborators to help with outreach to their networks. Here's an example of an *outreach email* sent to prospective collaborators. As new members join the network you'll want to ask them to reach out to their contacts as well.

PRO TIP: This is a good point to also start a list for sending network members updates.



STEP 7:

Collect logos and soft-launch your campaign.

If it's a rapid response campaign, the next step is to keep the network updated on the timing of the campaign and launch it! If it's a longer-term campaign, you'll want to share a work plan and other materials, giving members an opportunity to weigh in before you launch.

Keep in mind that the logos you display provide important symbolic power (logo storms are like petition counters for organizations).



STEP 8:

Identify and map the type of role each member is likely to play so you can engage them accordingly:

- A. *Network facilitator*: Puts together core pieces of campaign infrastructure (online website/ action platform, talking points/messaging, network mailing list, homebase, etc.). If you're starting a networked campaign this is probably the role you want to play.
- B. *Outreach partner*: Sometimes you'll want to have a small group of organizations that agree to email their list about the campaign and commit to other outreach work. These organizations may have agreements about mailing list opt-ins and data. These key partners can be listed above other members, as you'll see here: <https://stopstingrays.org/>
- C. *Policy experts*: These are independent or NGO-based members who can support your policy positions, and are usually not as strong on messaging and communications.
- D. *General members*: Civil society organizations, activists and businesses who are generally engaged, and hopefully help spread the word via social media and other channels.



STEP 9:

Set a launch date and kick off your campaign.

Try to give partners enough lead time to line up their own work (ideally a few weeks), but not so much that they forget about the project.

Encourage partners to help launch the campaign via social, email, media, etc., on the same day. Our voices are so much stronger together!



STEP 10:

Embrace these core elements of networked campaigning as you coordinate your campaign.

- A. *Dynamic*: Loosely coordinated by a fluid network of different groups and communities.
- B. *Decentralized*: Autonomous engagement is encouraged within the boundaries of a high-level statement of unity.
- C. *Inclusive*: Nearly anyone can join if they support the project statement of unity.
- D. *Amplifying*: Members are encouraged to share each other's materials (give recognition), and the network identity is more important than the brand of any single organization.

Setting up your network platforms:

Using a modern tech stack can enable you to embrace these core elements of networked campaigns, and [engagement principles](#) allow allied organizations to participate at the level they are comfortable with.

New/Mode's [Targeted Engagement tools](#) provide collaborators with a range of actions to point people to at differing levels of engagement. Collaborating organizations can even embed the action forms in their own websites.

Fully-integrated software platforms like [NationBuilder have Network features](#) that allow you to set the level of decentralization that works for you, from a network of autonomous groups with coordinated backend dataflows, to tighter controls over branding and content. It can be challenging to keep your data clean, provide value to partners and/or chapters, and maintain consistency in communications, but new technologies can help.

Working in a networked fashion allows your cause to reach a wider community and unlock additional capacity, skills, resources, and expertise, demonstrating strength and unity to decision-makers. We hope this guide, coupled with modern campaign tech and the [Full Spectrum Engagement](#) framework, can help you embrace the power of networks in your next campaign.