



PULL-OUT

Get networking

So you need to campaign against local air pollution or an unwanted road? Don't make your local group do all the work without help. Instead link up with other groups which have overlapping aims. Here are some ideas from FOE's great new book *How To Win* showing how to increase your chances of campaigning success

Networking involves getting the message out about your group – its aims, objectives and current campaigns – to like-minded groups. For example, a campaign on local air pollution might be able to tap into local residents' groups, mother and toddler groups, a local cycling campaign and so on. Networking should be an on-going activity which can spread your message and build support within local organisations in your community.

Alliances are more formal and focussed, where you may ask organisations to work alongside you for a specific campaign with a defined time scale. For example, community groups across the Midlands joined forces to try and stop the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. In the campaign to stop the East London River Crossing (and Save Oxleas Wood) a number of organisations joined forces to add clout and legitimacy to the campaign. Overall the decision to join or form an alliance will be determined by your campaign success.

Where to start

The first step is to investigate local campaigning and community organisations. Your local library or voluntary resources centre will have a directory of community groups – think laterally and do not just go for the usual suspects. Discuss networking opportunities at a group meeting so that you can identify which organisations to focus on and contact. Networking can help you to fill specific skills gaps, such as legal, planning and IT skills by bringing these in from other organisations. You may also be able to target and fill specific resource needs, such as computers, printing facilities and local materials.



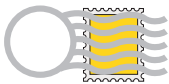
Make that initial contact

Once you have identified groups which might be interested in your campaign, make contact, first in writing, enclosing copies of campaign materials such as leaflets and briefings. Then follow this up with a telephone call asking them whether they want to support your campaign and if so how. For example: Would they like someone to talk to their group about the campaign? Would they be willing to distribute information to their membership? Would they like to go on your campaign mailing list? Would they like to support your campaign by signing a petition?



Tap into existing networks

As well as looking at organisations, look out for networks that are up and running. Such networks often charge a membership fee, but in return you may get a newsletter, access to advice and training. You will be tapping into an existing pool of skills and expertise and can ask – as a member – to contribute articles for network newsletters, an efficient and fast way to get your message out to many more people. For example the West Midlands Environment Network acts as a networking forum for information exchange, the sharing of resources, and the provision of support to enable groups, organisations and individuals across the West Midlands region to communicate more effectively. It works to strengthen links between organisations and help people to make new contacts, set up new projects as well as offering advice on working in partnership with others. It is particularly involved in supporting the Local Agenda 21 process in the region. As a member you get a monthly newsletter and access to information, resources and training.

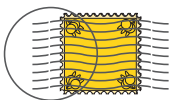


Alliances work

Alliances often form around single-issue campaigns such as a school closure, new incinerator, road proposal or landfill site. The actual aims of some groups may be different but on this particular issue there may be common ground. Forming an alliance can further your campaign by allowing you to:

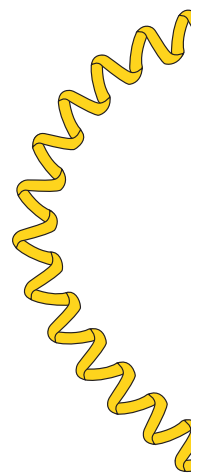
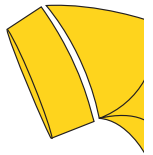


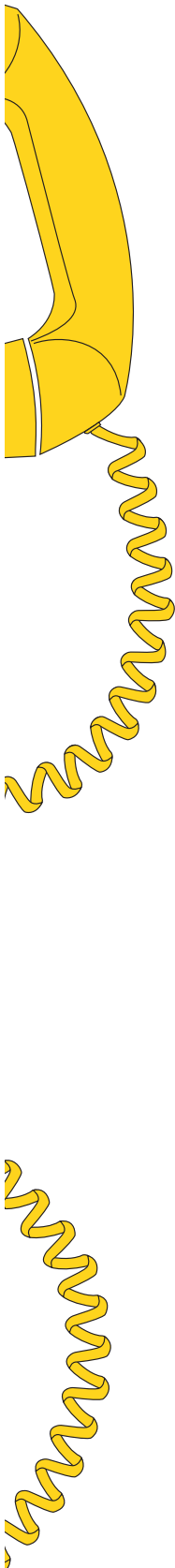
- Cover campaign targets more effectively
- Campaign effectively – involving other groups can increase your choice of campaign tactics and bring diverse voices to the campaign
- Delegate to a bigger pool of differing experience and interests
- Develop a wide skills and knowledge base, as well as sharing your resources, eg, reports and exhibitions
- Be seen to be co-operating, not going it alone
- Develop credibility in your community.



But there are also potential drawbacks to working in alliances because:

- Your group can become invisible by getting swallowed up by the alliance and lose sight of its own group identity or campaign objectives
- A lot of time can be wasted on trying to achieve consensus between groups with different agendas
- Groups may find themselves with strange bedfellows, such as a local politician trying to gain popularity through association with the alliance.





TIP

Ensure that an alliance plays to its potential strengths and avoids pitfalls

Have one very specific aim The simple single rule of an alliance is to have one specific aim, such as **No School Closure** or **Yes to Mytown Wind Farm**. This makes it easy for groups and individuals to join the campaign and will stop internal debates about alternatives that may be on offer.

Agree an identity

Some alliances opt for a common identity, such as an alliance logo, with all materials accordingly branded – leaflets, newsletters, reports, banners. Internally, groups represent their own organisations and agree actions. Externally the campaign – public meetings, media work, etc. – is done in the name of the alliance. Another option is for groups to keep their separate identities and co-ordinate their work through the alliance.

Whichever option your group chooses, alliance members need to discuss it, agree it and stick to it.

Set ground rules

Are you going to work on everything together or only on specific parts of the campaign? At times it makes sense to work together; at times you may have a stronger impact by working individually. How are you going to handle press enquiries – is anyone going to do it or do you need to agree two or three people who will lead on press work? How are you going to handle the finances? Setting ground rules from the outset will head off many of the potential problems of working in alliances.

Agree an end point

Your campaign may be won or lost. Either way the time will come when it makes sense to disband. Be prepared to recognise when the role of the alliance has come to an end.

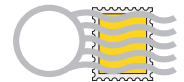
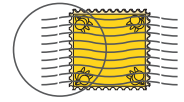
Right: Friends of the Earth joined forces with other Midlands community groups to prevent the BNRR from destroying Snellsmore Common in 1994.



Steven Bridge/FOE



Left: Working in a coalition can add clout and legitimacy to a campaign, and makes demonstrations more effective - the Save Oxleas Wood campaign in Kent in 1991 did save the ancient Oxleas Wood.



S. Horton/FOE



Networking in the virtual world

The world wide web (the web) is potentially the largest source of information in the world. Almost everyone now publishes information there: governments, companies and academic institutions as well as campaign groups and individuals. Whatever you want to know, no matter how specialist, there is a good chance that you will find it on the web. The trick is to use a search engine, the online equivalent of the librarian who looks up information using a card index, to help you find the information you are looking for. The best known directory/search engine is probably yahoo.com

Networking via a discussion group

Joining a discussion group can be like a heated pub conversation held in the comfort of your own home. It's a great way to share information because:

- It can be cheap – conversations can be staggered, allowing campaigning to be 24 hour and global, so campaigners can correspond at times convenient to them
- It's secure – encryption can prevent third parties from snooping
- It's accessible – even if you don't have web access there are cybercafes all round the world
- Information can be archived for easy access to all parties, which allows campaigners to develop best practice in the future
- Allows campaigners who live a long way from each other to act as a cohesive campaigning unit.

Finding info on the web

There is so much information stored on the web that you need to be canner than just typing in "environment" or "pollution". For example there are many ways to find out about climate change. Use inverted commas around "climate change" so the two words are searched for together. Or put a plus in the front +climate +change to search for both words in the same document. Or use a minus to tell the search engine not to search for that word, +climate -change. There are variations to these codes, depending on the search engine you use, but the principle is the same.

Favourite search engines

Try these: **oneworld.net** can be a good start for searching affiliated NGOs websites and **alltheweb.com** is comprehensive and fast. Other useful search engines are **altavista.com**; **google.com** and **yahoo.com**

To find out about FOE discussion groups send an email from your own account to majordomo@foe.co.uk leaving the subject line blank, and write in the message body: info name_of_list

You can choose your name_of_list from: **aviation, climate_change, factories_and_chemicals, food, forests, housing, local_agenda_21, north_west_groups, regional_development, roads, sellafield, sustainable_consumption, traffic_reduction, uk_wildlife, waste.**

If you want to join a discussion group, send an email from your own account to majordomo@foe.co.uk leaving the subject line blank, and write in the message body: subscribe name_of_list Once signed up to a discussion group you can send a message to the list by emailing name_of_list@foe.co.uk



"I have found the internet incredibly useful in my campaigning against organochlorine pollution. I subscribe to an email list (discussion group) which is dedicated to toxic chemicals. Through the list, I can keep up to date with the latest news and technical information and I can pick the brains of others on the list including scientists, consultants and other activists," says **Viv Mountford, Halton Friends of the Earth local group.**



Campaign mission ■

To get your hands on brilliant campaigning advice drawn from almost 30 years of Friends of the Earth's community-based campaigning experience.

Next step ■

Turn to the back cover and complete the order form for *How to Win* now!