



11.0 Engagement and Influencing

Getting Your Message Heard

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Delivery an effective campaign to change policy in Wales requires thought before you get started. It is important to have clear 'asks' and to understand what exactly you are trying to change, and the specific individuals who have the power to implement the change you require.

It is important to think of the what, why and how of your messaging, as well as some serious thought on comprehensively mapping out your intended audiences and refining it to be as effective as possible.

You can then think strategically about where the decision-making sits, who has the power to make the policy change, and what opportunities or tactics you can use to get your message to the right people, in the right way.

Choosing Your Message

The first thing you need to work out is what you want to say, and why. Decision-makers have a huge range of actors competing for their attention and will only be able to properly engage with a small selection – and the selection who manage to instigate action by decision-makers is even smaller.



Image: People looking at social media

You need to be clear on what the problem you are trying to fix is, why it needs to be fixed, and what your specific suggested solution to this problem is. If your organisation, **for example, provides services across a number of local authority areas with a significant variance in commissioning processes or funding model, you could develop a clear ask around the need to develop guidance on the relationship between local authorities and charities in your sector, or for a national funding model based on good practice already in place.** Are you asking for local authorities to change the way that they work, or for the Welsh Government to change national policy?

Knowing Your Audience

It is important to know your audience - who you are targeting and why.

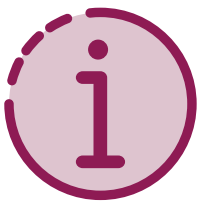
- Are you engaging in more traditional public communications, where the aim is to reach as many people as possible?
- Is it a public-facing campaign aimed a certain section of society that may be more likely to respond to your aims, or those that disagree with you?
- Or is your goal to strategically communication with a small number of decision-makers?

These different audiences can overlap. You may wish, for example, to run a public-facing campaign aimed at raising the profile of an issue, in order to encourage decision-makers to focus on your issue.

Whatever the objective, before launching your campaign it is important to have a clear idea of who you are targeting with your message. It is worth mapping out your key audience or stakeholders whilst planning your campaign and refine your messaging accordingly.

Refining Your Message

Once you have decided on the fundamentals of the what, why and how of your message, it is important to refine it. Your message will be different depending on the audience.



Information

If you are launching a public-facing campaign, the way you refine your message will be different depending on the audience and the medium.

Social media messages, **for example, will likely need to be refined to be 'shareable'**. An opinion piece in a newspaper or magazine will be refined depending on the nature of the publication, and the knowledge levels of its readers – a specialist trade magazine piece would go into far more detail than a piece in a tabloid introducing the subject.

Tone is important when approaching decision makers – they are more likely to bring a constructive approach if you also approach them constructively and respectfully.

A strong evidence base must be an important part of your campaign. Decision makers will not base policy decisions on hunches or personal beliefs, even if they share your outlook. They will eventually have to justify the decision, both within their organisation and externally to the public.

After you have established your strong evidence base, case studies and anecdotes are useful can be a useful way of promoting your idea. A combination of a well-evidenced policy suggestion that stands up to expert scrutiny, and a messaging rooted in powerful case studies are important components of any successful campaign.

Clarity and conciseness are vital in refining your message. Most people will immediately recall Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again', but struggle to recall Hillary Clinton's slogan. An unofficial poster led to Barack Obama's 2008 campaign seizing on a new level of conciseness in messaging – 'Hope'.

Opportunities for Change

It is important to have a good understanding of the rhythm and structures of government and politics. Events are a big driver of action in politics. These can be sporadic and opportunistic events, such as the issue that you are campaigning on becoming a lead story and the main focus of political attentions for a news cycle. Others are more structured, and it is important to be aware of these scheduled events and ensure that your message is plugging in to them.

At least every five years the political parties in Wales will write up their manifestos for the forthcoming Senedd elections, and at least one of these manifestos is likely to be adapted into the Welsh Government's programme for government. Competition for inclusion is therefore high, but it is a scheduled event that can act as one of the most direct routes to getting enacting policy.

It is therefore worth thinking about mapping out the opportunities you have to get your message across in a more effective way. New legislation, discussions around budgets, government consultations, and Senedd committee inquiries are all ways of feeding your message into the decision-making system in a more effective way.

Some opportunities can lead to others – for example, organisations that submit evidence to Senedd committee inquiries are often invited to give evidence in person, allowing you to get your message directly to a group of elected representatives.

Targeting Your Message

Finding your audience is important. Once you are able to clearly articulate what you are trying to fix, why you're trying to fix it, and how you're proposing to fix it, the decision-makers that are best placed to fix the problem will probably have become clearer.

Policy asks, however, may be confused by requiring more than one person to make a decision. Ending homelessness by building more housing, for example, would require the involvement of the Housing Minister and local authority figures such as council leaders, and cabinet members for housing.

A large investment could also outstrip the current budget the Housing Minister has, requiring the involvement of the Finance Minister and even the First Minister. This is an ambitious example, but it demonstrates how important it is to map stakeholders effectively and ensure that your message isn't being wasted by not being targeted at the right people.

Strategy and Tactics

Once you have decided on and refined your message, and picked your audience, it is time to think strategically about how you can 'make noise' for your message.



Information

One common technique in campaigns is staging. If your ask is too ambitious, think realistically about how you can move closer to your final goal. Rather than attempting to go from A to Z, you can map out how you go from A to B, and then to C.

Endorsements can also be a good way of making noise. Some people have louder voices and higher profiles than others and can therefore generate more noise. Think about if your campaign has any supporters who have a high profile – it could be politicians or even celebrities. If you are struggling to find endorsements, you could attempt to use staging – starting with, for example, local councillors and working your way up to endorsements from MPs and MSs.

When thinking about endorsements, you may also want to think about building coalitions of support, working with other organisations towards a shared aim. Consider whether other organisations working in your area would be willing to agree joint asks with your own in order to amplify your voices. **Time To Change Wales, for example, is a joint endeavour by mental health charities to end mental health discrimination.** The Wales Cancer Alliance has published a manifesto for the Senedd elections, providing a strong and unified voice on cancer policy in Wales.

If you are a charity, service users or their families can be a useful asset. They will be able to speak from a powerful personal perspective with authenticity, rather than in the more jargon-laden way professionals tend to slip into. It is important that there is a human element to your messaging, as somebody's lived experience will allow audiences to empathise and relate to the message, creating greater resonance.

Experts are important but think about the context and whether an appeal to emotion or logic would be more powerful.

One reason case studies involving real people are useful is because of the crowded field competing for attention. Rather than just presenting an argument, it is important to think innovatively and provide engaging content that cuts through this crowded field – and emotive case studies can cut through the noise.

Gone are the days when sending long paper policy documents or reports to decision makers and politicians are seen as effective methods of getting your message heard. Think about how else you can get your message across, and how else you can grab their attention and make them want to understand more about the topic you raise. Innovative and engaging content is important, as well as providing shareable content for social media.

In summary, when crafting a message to achieve change, there are a number of important things to consider. You need to know what you are trying to fix and why, as well as how specifically you propose to achieve this. You need to know your audience and who you are targeting, and why you have decided to target them. Once you have this information you can hone and refine your message to make it as compelling as possible. You can then think strategically and tactically about the dissemination of your message in order to achieve the greatest amount of impact.



Cefnogi Trydydd
Sector **Cymru**

Third Sector
Support **Wales**

Third Sector Support Wales is a network of support organisations for the whole of the third sector in Wales.

It consists of the 19 local and regional support bodies across Wales, the County Voluntary Councils (CVCs) and the national support body, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA).

For further information contact
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