



## **Guidelines for Mounting an Effective Campaign**

### **1 Introduction**

While there may be no right or wrong way to mount a campaign to achieve an effective outcome, some activities related to Scottish Power Energy Networks (SPEN) Dumfries & Galloway Strategic Reinforcement (DGSR) 2015 project proposal seemed to yield results that helped Dumgal Against Pylons (DGAP's) campaign succeed. These guidelines, therefore, seek to outline the activities that helped the campaign achieve its aim: encouraging SPEN to consider a more acceptable solution.

That is not to say the guideline that follows is universal in its application. It should be appreciated that what worked well for DGAP may not, especially in full, work for every campaign. Thus, it may be appropriate to 'cherry-pick' some elements while discarding others. None the less, it is hoped that at least the principles that follow may be applied to a wide variety of campaign causes.

As well as highlighting the positive steps that can be taken, the guideline also provides advice on what steps are best avoided. Failure to observe these latter points may present the campaign in a negative light and cause it to fail to achieve its aim.

Finally, the guidance that follows is structured under several key headings. In practice, these are not mutually exclusive but interact on several levels. They are presented here, in this way, simply to partition the guidelines to help document the experience and learning from DGAP's campaign. No attempt is made to prioritise the various activities, although they are presented in what is considered a logical order. To achieve success, all stages are important – to some degree.

### **2 Campaign Guidelines**

#### **2.1 Getting Started**

Once some cause raises its head and you feel you are all alone the likelihood is that you are not. There is a strong chance there will be others, out there, who share similar concerns. Informal networks – work colleagues, neighbours and family, community council meetings, and so on, are all useful means by which to identify others who may be similarly affected and wish to do something about whatever it is that is causing concern.

On the basis that two heads are better than one, organise a meeting with a few of these individuals and see if there is common ground. To begin with, you don't

need an army of like-minded folk – four or five is quite sufficient to begin to bounce ideas around and plan an effective campaign. Indeed, at this stage there is an argument that having too many involved can be counter-productive.

## **2.2 Getting a Focus**

One of the first challenges for any campaign group is to reach common agreement on precisely what is it that has given rise to the campaign. As well as agreeing the cause it is important that a clear understanding emerges for: why is it a concern and more particularly, what other, better, alternatives exist.

In other words, the campaign needs an aim. A single sentence should suffice, and to be effective it should pitch the campaign, and the group behind the campaign, in a positive light. By this is meant it is simply not good enough to state, “the campaign is opposed to ...” What is needed, to gain the backing of the wider community, and especially those in a position to influence matters, is to be seen to embrace the principle of what is being proposed but to highlight that there are more appropriate means by which to achieve the same end. The words, ‘more appropriate,’ in this instance, may be typically defined by one or more of the following: cheaper, smaller, reduced environmental impact, less harmful, less intrusive, more efficient, result in less opposition, and so on.

Having an aim along these lines can help divert the all too common criticism, from many quarters, that the individuals behind the campaign are simply, NIMBY’s. So ideally, your cause needs to become that of a *cause célèbre*, which means avoiding at all cost allowing people’s egos taking over and the cause becoming hijacked by one or two people.

## **2.3 Getting Organised**

Many campaign groups may choose to conduct their business at an informal level, and this may take the form of a social occasion. However, a campaign whose focus is aimed at influencing government or some major enterprise, or both, will be better served by having a formal constitution where meetings are conducted along more business-like lines.

Different forms or levels of constitution exist and careful thought will need to be given to which is pursued. Often, an unincorporated organisation is all that is required and it has the advantage of being simple to set up, register and administer. Officers will need to be appointed, decisions on membership will need to be taken, regularity of ordinary, special and annual meetings will require consideration.

All in all, though, the process requires little effort to administer but has the advantage of regularising the activities of the group while demonstrating to those you wish to influence that the campaign is being conducted along business-like lines, which helps add credibility.

What will be required by this stage is to agree a suitable name for your campaign group. In the case of DGAP, or Dumgal Against Pylons, the name has always been a misnomer in so far as we recognised from the outset that pylons would be needed, but not pylons suitable for a 400kV overhead line. We knew the campaign aim could be achieved by maintaining the transmission voltage at the present 132kV, thereby reducing the average height of any new pylons to

around 27m – just a few metres taller than the existing line, but much smaller than the proposed 50m pylons. However, the name Dumgal Against Pylons stuck – it resonated with members and helped unite the majority of communities within Dumfries & Galloway to back our region-wide cause - a *cause célèbre!*

## **2.4 Understanding the Need**

Now that the campaign is up and running - with an aim that may be written in very general, but positive terms, a vitally important step in the life of the campaign is to develop a detailed understanding of why the development proposal is being put forward. In the case of Dumfries & Galloway the proposal was for new electricity transmission infrastructure, but it could equally apply to other major proposals, such as: shale-gas fracking, a renewable energy project such as an on-shore windfarm, a new gas pipeline, a motorway or road development, or a high-speed rail link.

In each of these cases it is important that a clear understanding of the need for the proposal emerges, because it is only when the need has been unpacked and examined that the campaign can begin to mount an effective challenge and put forward alternatives. This exercise may highlight weaknesses in the proposal that can be exploited. However, getting to this position is likely to require some form of expertise or specialism. At this point the campaign group will need to identify what skills and knowledge are required, some of which they, themselves, may not possess. In the examples cited above, mechanical and electrical engineering, civil and structural engineering, railway and track engineering, physics, chemical engineering and geo-physics all come to mind, not forgetting of course other specialisms such as, landscape architecture, land management, forestry, heritage, cultural history, environmental management, economics and so on.

Such a list may sound daunting, and consultants hired at a commercial rate can be expensive and way beyond the financial reach of most campaign organisations. But, interestingly, by casting around and making enquiries it may be possible to locate people with this specialist knowledge living within the affected community, or at least close by, or have relatives that do. In such instances, it may be possible to recruit this expertise at no cost, with the time from these experts given freely to help advance the case for an alternative, less invasive proposal.

## **2.5 Develop a Strategy**

Having understood the challenge and established the cause, and with a suitable team in place the time is right to develop a winning strategy. Developing a winning strategy is not a complicated process – put simply, it's what do we need to do and what resources do we need to succeed?

A good place to begin is by reviewing the campaign group's strengths and weaknesses. Brainstorming helps - how to play to the strengths and minimise any weaknesses, and how to bring additional resources to bear to turn weakness into a strength? There may be opportunities that have not been considered, let alone exploited, and there may also be threats on the horizon. They all need to go into the 'melting pot' at this stage.

Serendipity can be a god-send to any campaign, but it cannot be relied upon. Far better to at least consciously review what might occur in the external environment. Potential factors usually considered here lie in the political, economic, social and technological areas. To provide meaning let's take a 'political' example from DGAP's campaign. The 2015 Conservative Election Manifesto pledged to withdraw subsidies for more on-shore wind projects – a factor that was driving the need to upgrade the electricity transmission network. Once in office, DGAP reminded the Minister of the manifesto pledge and shortly afterwards the subsidy was withdrawn a year earlier than had been expected by the renewables industry, thereby helping to reduce the anticipated build-up of further renewable generation.

Once all these factors have been considered and evaluated prepare a strategic plan that includes, who is responsible for the various actions and the timelines for completing them. Once the plan is in place, stick to it unless the internal (within the campaign group) or the external environment changes.

## **2.6 Establishing a Public Face**

Now that you know what you need to accomplish it's time to let the world know you exist. The easiest way to do this is to set up a website. There are several free website builders available and it is relatively easy to link the website to Facebook and Twitter social media accounts. Of course, this means you will need to appoint a webmaster – an individual with sufficient skills to set up and manage the website and handle social media. Fortunately, many communities possess such talent nowadays – so the task will be to encourage them to back the campaign.

Ensure the website and social media accounts act as the external face of the organisation. It will need to be updated regularly to keep it fresh and interesting as well as act as the repository of meeting minutes, any learning and plans of action so that members can be kept abreast of progress.

Where a campaign runs for some time it may also help to think about a monthly newsletter as a means by which to keep readers aware of what has been achieved and what to expect over the coming month. Armed with the website, social media accounts and the newsletter it becomes a relatively easy task to circulate such information to local and national newspapers as well as TV and local radio stations. Once in the public eye, be prepared to participate in interviews – often requested at short notice.

Avoid being taken off-guard and always field someone capable of representing the aims of the campaign in a positive manner - your group should not be portrayed as being unreasonable. Unless you already have a script prepared – and you should, inform the person asking for an interview that you will call them back in 10-15 minutes, which will give you time to collect your thoughts and prepare the key points you need to get across.

After the interview is broadcast, or the piece goes into the newspaper, review what is said in the round – because for balanced reporting both sides of the argument is usually reported and ask yourself what could have been done better. Build this learning into the next interview.

## **2.7 Articulating the Arguments**

Having gained some publicity and raised the profile of the campaign, and here it helps to have one person in the organisation whose task it is to deal with the press – not only to report on the background and what has been done, as and when it occurs, but someone who also looks for opportunities to extend the reach of the group. Some groups 'punch above their weight' and this is often down to the publicity/communications officer who is constantly thinking strategically about creating publicity opportunities.

However, publicity is one thing, but getting out and about is another. Demonstrations and banner waving in public places lie at one end of the spectrum – aided greatly by social media whereby large numbers of supporters can be alerted to an event at short notice and with minimal effort. Such public displays need to be handled with caution though they can be helpful at the beginning of a campaign, or as a last resort, but think carefully about the public space used for such events. Choosing the wrong location may act against the aims of the campaign and cause it to lose some support.

At the other end of the spectrum lies the need to engage: often with smaller groups in meetings and presentations, some public and some private. This may include community groups or it may involve council officials or a range of other public servants, or bodies. It may even include the body making the proposal against which the campaign group is campaigning - and if it is then so much the better. The key in all these instances is being prepared. This is where the expertise of the campaign will be put under the spotlight so it is important that sufficient homework and preparation goes into any briefing material. It is here that the campaign's understanding of the 'need' and alternative proposals will be tested by an external audience.

You need to have plausible and convincing answers to the many questions you will face, and as such this will be a real testing ground for your campaign. Think carefully about the best people to take along to these meetings. Play to your strengths, and if necessary have a rehearsal at which one supporter is asked to pose the difficult or awkward questions. Practice your answers to achieve the greatest impact and ask some of the group to critique your performance – with the emphasis on what could be improved and what best to avoid.

## **2.8 Raising Credibility**

Gaining credibility is key with any campaign. You want people to take you and the campaign seriously and respect what you say. The problem is that many people will have never met you before and may have heard about the campaign only recently. In other words, the campaign group, and the people behind it, may have no track record – so how can you expect those you are seeking to influence to share your concerns and believe you?

This lack of credibility is a dilemma facing many groups and one which often goes unrecognised for some time – often too long. In such circumstances, it can be of immense benefit to invite someone who has recognised standing in the community to join the group, perhaps in the position of President. Such a person is likely to bring with them experience that can be of immense value to the campaign, and that experience can help the group avoid making mistakes that could set back the cause.

While the right choice of President can provide advice to the Chair and other officers on such factors as strategy, direction and timing it is likely that such a person will also bring with them a rich source of additional key contacts, many of whom may be able to assist the campaign achieve its aim. Such a strong and distinguished cohort articulating the cause will soon help raise credibility.

Credibility, of course, very much depends on how the campaign group conducts itself in public. Acting in a professional and respectful manner in meetings is essential. Avoid criticism of the other party and instead try and outline the positive: the good points of the proposal in what it seeks to achieve.

Ensure that anything that goes into the public domain is independently critiqued to avoid giving offence, however unintentional, to any party. Avoid blunders with social media. Twitter is a good example of a tool that in the wrong hands can all too often lead to later regret. Beyond this, if minutes of meetings are included on the website ensure the participating parties have had an opportunity to approve the minutes and are happy for them to be made public.

## **2.9 Cultivating and Keeping Allies**

Cultivating allies is a must for a successful campaign – and there are many of them. Community Councils and their growing importance in reflecting the views of local communities to government has never been greater. It is essential that any campaign gains their support for the cause. If multiple Community Councils can be encouraged to come on board it will greatly increase the strength of the argument. In the case of DGAP, almost 2/3 of all Community Councils (59 in total) gave their assent to the case for SPEN to reconsider their proposal. We deliberately positioned DGAP to avoid the NIMBY label, and this helped greatly in gaining support from all quarters.

With such strength of feeling, elected representatives such as local councillors, MSP's and MP's can soon be encouraged to give their backing, regardless of political persuasion, and by doing so it is possible to make the campaign non-political. Beyond this, the view of the Local Authority (the full Council) will determine the future direction of the proposal. Meet with the relevant Officers, along with MSP's and MP's that care to join you. Take along some of your experts to let the audience appreciate there are more acceptable alternatives. Offer to give a more comprehensive presentation to Officers and elected representative at a future date.

In all these discussions at Local Authority level the campaign group will need to appreciate that for some proposals, especially where a Section 37 (of The Electricity Act, 1989) consent is sought, elected representatives will be barred from expressing an opinion on the need for the proposal. It is possible, however, and any campaign group faced with this type of proposal should encourage representatives to express their thoughts so long as they do not publically express they are against the need. The Local Authority may need to give leave to representatives to provide this freedom of expression.

Having gained such important allies it is vital that the group consciously recognises, through their actions, the need to keep these allies onside. That

means avoiding saying or doing anything that may alienate them. 'Think before acting' is the motto here.

There are many other allies that can assist the cause and their importance should not be overlooked. Some are classed as statutory consultees within the planning process framework. The RSPB is a case in point and their view, along with that of other consultees, carries significant weight. There are many other potential allies, though, usually NGO's, and a brainstorm exercise will soon yield a significant number that can be approached to ask for support.

Having gained these allies be sure to keep them informed of your activities. Send them a copy of your monthly newsletter, for example. They may not read it, possibly due to lack of time, but they will appreciate the gesture none the less.

### **2.10 Staying the Course**

You have an aim and an organisation. You have a public face and have publicised what you are about. Moreover, local people will now recognise you and many will be sympathetic and supportive. That goes for elected representatives right across the political spectrum even though they may not choose to say so in public.

With all these hard-won steps in place don't forget to stick to the strategic plan and work to your timetable – as best you can, of course. But don't forget to do something many businesses fail to do, and that is to review the strategy and plan at regular intervals, to examine whether the internal or external environment has changed. Your campaign needs to be nimble and respond to changing circumstances quickly to leverage opportunities that may present themselves or to potential threats that need attention.

### **2.11 Celebrate Success**

Success is hard-won, so celebrate. It's another opportunity for publicity. But if you do publicise, be gracious, present the win-win scenario as opposed to win-lose. After all, you have not been fighting a battle. What you have been trying to do is to influence another party to consider alternative schemes you believe to be better suited. The fact they have listened and changed their thoughts and plans is part of their strength – so compliment them.