Social Action Toolkit

What is Social Action?

Social action is the practice of taking action – usually as part of an organized group or community – to create positive change. Sometimes social action can lead to profound social change, as in the case of the Civil Rights Movement; sometimes social action seeks more limited and specific changes – the preservation of an open space, for example, or better pay for a specific group of workers.

Social action, by its nature, is often practiced by those who either traditionally have little power in society – the poor, minorities, or people with disabilities, for example – but it may also be used by any group that feels its concerns are being ignored. By working together, members of these groups can exercise power collectively because of their numbers, using the media, their votes, boycotts, and other types of social, political, and economic pressure to convince those in power to rethink their positions.

Different Forms of Social Action:

There are many ways you can become active in your communities and beyond. Listed below are some different forms of social action:

Creative action – This can take many forms, including ['flash mobs'](#) and craftivism:

Craftivism – Craftivism is a form of social activism centred on practices of craft (such as painting, knitting, sewing) that seeks to make positive social change. Examples include the [Craftivist Collective](#), who successfully managed to convince Marks & Spencer (M&S) to pay its employees the living wage by making personalised, hand-embroidered handkerchiefs with hopeful messages for each of M&S's board members, presenting them as gifts at the company's annual meeting. Within 10 months, M&S had made a U-turn. Read more [here](#).

Protests

Mass street action / marches – Taking to the streets is a much-used tactic to get a message across and effect some change. One example is the [Women's March](#) in 2016, when on the first full day of Donald Trump's presidency more than 3 million people across the world marched against the Trump administration and the perceived threat it represented to women's rights and wider human rights. Whilst the marches themselves did not remove Trump from office (indeed, this was not their aim), it was a powerful mass mobilisation and a sign of resistance.

Boycotts – One of the most famous boycotts during the Civil Rights Movement was the Montgomery Bus Boycott. During this boycott Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus. Because of this, many African Americans refused to ride on the buses in Montgomery. Bus system wasn't bringing in enough revenue, and the result was desegregation on buses. Overall, it was a huge success! Read more [here](#).

Strikes – School students around the world went on strike to protest for greater action on climate change, as part of the 'Fridays for Future' or 'School Strike for Climate' movement started by Greta Thunberg. It happened in 7,500 cities, across all continents and mobilised +13,000,000 people! This

action put climate change at the top of the news agenda and mobilised an entire generation of young people. Read more [here](#).

Digital Advocacy

Digital advocacy is the use of technology to galvanize people towards a cause. Technology can be used to influence public perception, and can be ground breaking in helping us exercise our civic muscle, pushing for changes and improvements in society and making the world a better place through a more informed and active citizenry. Here are just a few examples:

Online petitions: Signing an online petition is one way to get your voice heard: with [Gov.uk petitions](#), if a petition gets 10,000 signatures, the Government will respond. If a petition gets 100,000 signatures, it will be considered for a debate in parliament.

Social media: The use of social media such as Twitter, Instagram and blogging can be a great platform to get your voice heard, as well as to mobilise and connect with likeminded people and campaigns.

How to: Build a Campaign

Create a Theory of Change:

When building a campaign, we have to ask ourselves if what we're doing is really contributing to the change we want to see. Using a simple 'theory of change' approach can help us make the connections between what we're doing and the change we want to see.

1. **What is the overall change you want to see?**
    This question invites you to zoom out to the bigger picture impact; it goes beyond your own contribution and may be some way into the future.

    Newspaper Headline Exercise: Imagine what the newspaper headline will be on the day that the campaign or advocacy initiative succeeds clarifies the overall change. Develop headline ideas individually, then share the ideas as a group and discuss any similarities and differences before agreeing the overall change collectively.

2. **What are the pre-conditions to success?**
    These are the changes that need to happen before the overall change can come about. It is often easiest to consider these as the flip-side of what the obstacles to change are. For example, to make progress towards ending climate change, the following changes will be critical:
    o   Government and private sector investment in renewable energy
    o   International cooperation that leads to a globally owned solution
    o   The end of fossil fuel extraction and subsidies.

3. **What is your contribution?**
    It is important to clarify where you think your specific contribution will be (the added value) so that you can understand your impact, alongside that of other groups or organisations working towards the same overall change. For example, lots of different groups and organisations want to reduce fossil fuel pollution, but they contribute in different ways:

- Art not Oil is contributing to change by trying to end oil company sponsorship of the arts.
- The Climate Coalition is contributing to change by trying to mobilise UK citizens to put pressure on their politicians to take action.
- Divestment campaigns contribute to change by getting individuals and institutions to withdraw their investment from fossil fuel companies.

4. **What does progress look like?**

Before you get started on implementing your strategy and planning your activities, a theory of change approach encourages you to think at the outset about how you would know if you were making progress and to set out a change pathway. A **change pathway** maps your activities through the changes – sometimes called intermediate outcomes or milestones – to the overall change.

You want to try and think about how progress can be tangible or visible – what would people be doing or saying that is different to now?
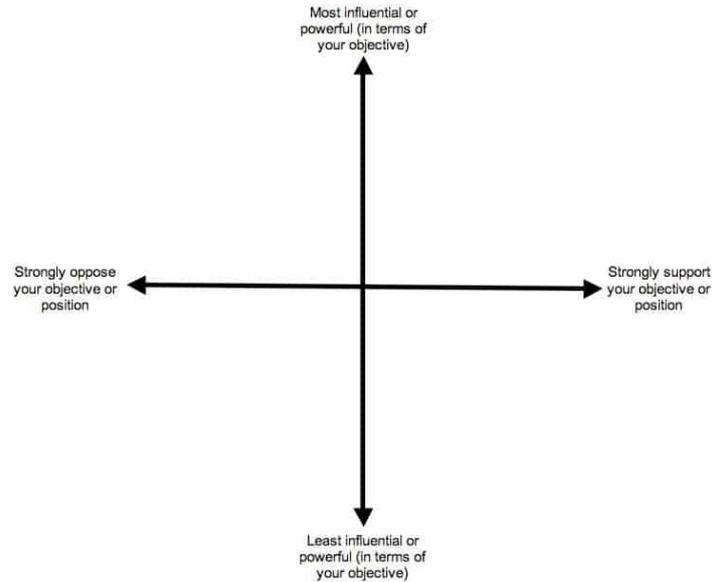
There are many ways in which organisations can trace their contribution and progress, not just in terms of policy change. For example, advocacy and campaigns can:
- Strengthen civil society voice or the collective strength of civil society
- Strengthen citizens' understanding and empowerment
- Generate new knowledge and information which can be used to influence change
- Create new structures and spaces for dialogue and engagement between civil society (or citizens) and government
- Change attitudes or social norms
- Set new precedents in relation to the behaviour of governments or other actors

Build a Power Mapping Analysis:

Power mapping and analysis helps campaigners consider the social and political context within which they are developing strategy, and to creatively consider allies, opponents, targets and constituents prior to embarking on a campaign.

1) Decide the main outcome your campaign hopes to achieve – this needs to be a realistic and achievable objective (e.g. recycling bins in every classroom or a doubling council's budget for native tree planting).

2) With this outcome in mind, draw out a power mapping axis (see below), and map the names of organisations and people with whom you might need to engage in order to achieve this outcome. These could include:
- Local government
- State government – which departments, MPs, ministers?
- Religious institutions / faith leaders
- The media – which journalists / newspapers etc.?
- Community groups
- Influential people e.g. celebrities

Most influential or powerful (in terms of your objective)

Strongly oppose your objective or position ← → Strongly support your objective or position

Least influential or powerful (in terms of your objective)

3) Using cards, map them onto the axis, identifying the organisation or individual holding the most power in terms of delivering your desired outcome followed by all the rest, identifying how they are related to your organisation, to the main power-holder and to each other.
   o How much influence do they hold?
   o Do they cooperate with each other or are they in conflict? Do you presently have a relationship with these people? Are they likely to agree with your position?

4) Consider the relative power of the stakeholders in your campaign. Who is closest to the key decision makers? Move them around.

5) When your map is complete, take a step back and discuss with your team. What do you notice? Where do you see opportunities to get to your target? Highlight the people or institutions on the map with whom you have good relationships in one colour. Highlight in another colour the people or institutions you believe you could influence.

6) Make a plan. What opportunities exist to influence your target? Are there people or organisations who hold power and who you might successfully influence? Discuss how your strategy could take advantage of those opportunities. Identify the two or three locations within the map where you feel your campaign might affect the greatest influence.

How to: Get Involved

Social action / Civic participation / Community-building Schemes:

- **National Citizen Service** – a voluntary personal and social development programme for 15–17 year olds in England and Northern Ireland. It helps you build your skills for work and life, while you take on new challenges and meet new friends. You'll have a short time away from home and take part in a team project that will help your community. See more here.

- **Patchwork Foundation** – provides a variety of opportunities for young people to build their prospects, self-belief, and confidence as active members of political and civil society e.g. the Patchwork Masterclass Programme which develops participants' personal and professional skills and increases political knowledge over a ten-month programme. This is for people aged 18-30, so something to think about for the future! See more here.

- **Advocacy Academy** - a transformational Social Justice Youth Organising Movement for young people from South London who are passionate about creating a more fair, just and equal society. This is for pupils in years 12 and 13 – so again something to think about for the future!

- **Volunteering Matters** – provides opportunities for young people to make a difference in their communities and their lives through the power of volunteering e.g. their Positive Futures programmes work with young people to design and deliver the social action they care about. See more here.

Resources:

- UK Parliament –offers a range of free resources to help individuals, communities, organisations and schools across the UK learn about Parliament. See more here and here.

- The Black Curriculum – a social enterprise that aims to deliver black British history all across the UK, which has free resources for students to learn about Black history. See more here.

- The Prince's Trust: CV top tips, Building Confidence, Professional Skills, Money Management, Business Tools, Finding a Job. See more here.