

What Campaigner Networks could do for us, and how they could do it: outcomes of the Campaigner Networks Review 2009

This paper summarises the outcomes of the 2009 Campaigner Networks Review project, and lays out plans for the improved structure and functionality for Friends of the Earth's Campaigner Networks that has resulted. It takes into consideration the findings of the local groups and staff consultations and the solutions they offered. It is not a description of what currently exists. This paper will provide the basis for the implementation phase of the Campaigner Networks Review project.

Whilst the consultation phase of this review is now closed, the content of this paper is not carved in stone. It will be a "living document" that changes as new perspectives and lessons shape it into a final vision of what Campaigner Networks should do for Friends of the Earth, and a description of how we can deliver that vision for our activists.

As such, feedback from local group members is welcome on any aspect of this paper. Please contact Jenny Thatcher for further information and/or to provide suggestions and feedback. We have worked hard to ensure that the new-look Campaigner Networks will meet the needs of all of our local group members first and foremost, as well as providing a welcoming space for those new to Friends of the Earth. We'd love to know what you think.

Jenny Thatcher, Senior Activism Co-ordinator
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What is a Campaigner Network?

The term "Campaigner Network" means different things to different people, both in a Friends of the Earth context and more broadly. The definition set out below presents an *aspirational* idea of what a campaigner network *should* be for Friends of the Earth.

- A campaigner network is a group of people who talk to and take action with each other. It comprises a group of individuals who are united in their shared interest in a specific issue. "Tools" (such as websites and email lists) are a means to support the network, not the network itself.
- Networks at Friends of the Earth have a web-page and discussion group for sharing resources, ideas and networking.
- Networks exist over a sustained period of time and are bound by a network agreement (currently in development).
- Networks are interactive, and information and discussions are initiated and followed up by network members.
- Networks at Friends of the Earth are promoted to all local group members via our local group communication channels (e-news, CYW, Network Developers, Campaigns staff).

- Networks are open to new and existing local group members, Friends of the Earth individual activists, staff members and any other external experts with relevant interest in the issue area.

Based on this definition, Friends of the Earth does not currently have any fully functional networks, although it does have some effective tools that support networking among some people in some campaign areas.

Purpose of the Campaigner Networks:

Building on the definition above, Friends of the Earth's campaigner networks should exist to provide information, support and networking opportunities to local activists on particular campaign issues, and to enable them to participate effectively and support each other in campaign development and delivery on those issues.

To this end they should provide:

1) An engaging, inspiring and welcoming space

An online "home" for a campaign issue that is inspiring, accessible, easy to use and provides information and ways to interact at different levels.

2) Effective activism

A one-stop-shop for opportunities and support to participate in national priority campaigns, national non-priority campaigns and local group-led networks.

3) An intersection of knowledge and expertise

Space and facilities for sharing and discussing campaign updates, issues and information, best practice examples, resources, success stories and skills from staff to local campaigners and vice versa, and between local campaigners.

4) Development opportunities

Regular and appropriate opportunities to strengthen members' campaign interests and expertise and link in with a wider activist community, within Friends of the Earth and beyond.

Aim of the Campaigner Networks Review project:

The broad aim of this project was to establish a system of Campaigner Networks for Friends of the Earth that builds on what we already have but that enables us to deliver consistent, effective networking and information-sharing opportunities for local activists and staff that are fit for purpose and meet the definition set out above.

What this means in practice:

The following sections of this paper describe the new structure and set of functions for improved campaigner network support at Friends of the Earth, and an approximate timeline for when those improvements will be implemented.

ONLINE

This section outlines essential, useful and desirable functions for an online Campaigner Networks presence. We will aim to address all "Essential" and "Useful" functions ready for the initial launch of the new-look Campaigner Networks. "Desirable" functions will be addressed later, according to capacity and demand,

1) A public home-page

Each network has a home-page on Community. This page hosts basic information about what the Network covers and related national campaigns, links to key information and briefings, instructions on how to join, and a box for members to log in to their online user account. Also the latest press for change actions, and information on things activists can be doing on the campaign. This page is publicly accessible and easily found from the main foe.co.uk homepage. There could also be a "join a campaigner network" link on the homepage, which takes you to a page where they are all listed, with a one-sentence explanation of what the network is. There might be more than one publicly accessible page for each network, depending on the resourcing for the campaign (similar to the groups of pages we currently have for the priority campaigns – resources, success stories, etc). **ESSENTIAL**

2) Joining

simple online form for each network, linked to our central contacts database. **ESSENTIAL**

- Follows through to a welcome message outlining how network works etc. **ESSENTIAL**
- Needs to recognize you as a member of other networks/having an online account. (so you are de-duped if announcements go out across multiple networks etc) **ESSENTIAL**
- Once you are logged in one place, you are logged in on all. **ESSENTIAL**
- Needs to list options for involvement eg. Daily/weekly digests for discussion emails (*we need to work work out what default would be here – all emails or no emails*) etc. **ESSENTIAL**

additional features:

- The contact point for a group on a priority campaign will receive email updates on priority campaign – this will include permanent invitation to join the network for this campaign. This button will take people straight to the joining page for that network described above. **USEFUL**
- If Friends of Earth has sent out resources to this contact point, at given times we would want a box to pop up to ask how a group/individual got on with a given action (e.g. first time someone logs into their networks after a Day of Action, the box would pop asking them to fill in how it went, upload photos etc). **DESIRABLE**

3) A members' homepage

- Members homepage: copy of welcome message with instructions. **ESSENTIAL**
- Generic blurb on what network is about – same as on public space. Plus links to any info we wouldn't share on public site (confidential campaign briefings etc). **ESSENTIAL**
- Buttons offering discussion group/file sharing/photos (functionality to be decided) etc would be available consistently from public facing site **ESSENTIAL** – but if you clicked on these without being logged in you would get a message saying "log in and join network". **ESSENTIAL**
- Tailored content based on user's preferences. Based on previous activities (what you last looked at). **DESIRABLE**

4) Discussion facilities

- Ability to respond and receive by email (even if tool is web-based). **ESSENTIAL**
- User identified by real name and some context (local group membership/individual activist) **ESSENTIAL**
- Facility for personal messages to be sent between members of network **DESIRABLE**
- Security – define and enforce different levels of security for discussions etc **ESSENTIAL**

- Post attachments in messages – or links to documents. **ESSENTIAL**

5) Other interactive functions

- Searchable archive of discussion messages and uploaded resources with online filing system. **ESSENTIAL**
- Straight forward way to upload and download resources to network (us and members) **USEFUL**
- Easy to use search facilities – effective search term recognition. **ESSENTIAL**
- Expertise/campaigner database for networking –could be added to people’s profiles **USEFUL**
- Web chat room **DESIRABLE**
- Contact details for members so one-to-one phone chats can take place – viewable profiles of network members **USEFUL** (one to one messaging needs to happen somehow)
- Photo/film sharing facility **DESIRABLE**

6) Other features

- 1) Clearly defined announcements list - separate from discussion list for staff (or network co-ordinator) to make campaign announcements. **ESSENTIAL**
- 2) Central campaigns action update page, with accompanying alerts list (separate from the networks - something campaigners could sign up to receive). **ESSENTIAL**
- 3) Alerts when new content is added to network you’ve signed up with (e.g briefings/photos etc). **USEFUL** – should be able to turn this off too.
- 4) Guidance and support for effective use of time online. Get the best out of your networks. **USEFUL**
- 5) "Breadcrumb trail" system of navigation **USEFUL**

OFFLINE

The general conclusion that the local groups consultation and the staff involved have come to is that we can’t really afford to cater very comprehensively for people who aren’t online. There is no substitute for online tools in terms of speed of communications and ease of administration/information sharing among network moderators and users. Very few people (if any) are unable to access the internet now, and we should focus our efforts on supporting them to get familiar with using the web as a campaign tool, rather than spending lots of time creating alternative but less effective ways for them to access the information.

However we should incorporate human contact into the networks as this is integral to networking and a lot of people don’t want their campaigning to happen solely online. The list below outlines some options that require further testing/investigation (it is likely that these potential offline elements will be developed over a longer timescale than the online elements of the project):

6) Face to face meetings

These take time to organise and attend, but in some instances would probably be a welcome option for campaigners planning local campaigns or wishing to get more up to speed with an issue or national campaign. They could include planning meetings, advisory group-style feedback sessions, and training days.

7) Phone conferences

These have been trialed on a regional basis through Get Serious, and they could provide a more personalized, “human” way of interacting for network

members who don't like using online communication as their only method. They also enable "realtime" discussions to take place. We'd need to work out how we could set these up so they could be offered as a resource rather than something staff have to facilitate each time.

8) **Ambassadors/champions/gurus**

These would be individual network members (or specially recruited volunteers) who could act as hubs for information and signposting for people who were network members but who either couldn't or wouldn't spend a lot of time online. They could pass on key information and action updates, help to arrange meetings and/or online or phone chats to discuss particular issues, and help to link up groups based on a campaign issue. This idea needs a lot more thought and investigation.

9) **Paper-based materials**

This would need to be limited (probably) to a paper mailing, if requested, with the basic campaign information and ways to keep in touch with the campaign (and an offer of support to get online/outline of features on the website if they join). This would need to be updated periodically and we'd need to quantify how much work this would take against how many people would actually need it.

Deciding what Campaigner Networks we need

We've worked with campaigns staff to agree a 3-category structure for networks under the new system. This system aims to:

- Reflect national organisational priorities
- Reflect the level of staff involvement in a given network
- Structure networks into a user-friendly system for ease of navigation
- Offer a framework for supporting and hosting local group-led networks

The categories would break down as follows:

- **Category A:** are networks that represent a key organisational priority campaign area (e.g. climate change), that have staff input (via a Campaign Assistant, other specialist campaigners or activism staff) and that would be managed by staff. These tend to be broad issue areas and are not time-bound or focused on one specific campaign.
- **Category B:** are networks that represent *current* national campaigns or projects. They have varying levels of staff time invested in them (this is likely to fluctuate and at key points in priority campaigns will be considerable). They are managed by staff. These networks are time-bound (they exist for the life of the campaign/project). When these networks are no longer priorities/live issues, network members are then encouraged to join (or automatically added to) the appropriate Category A network.
- **Category C:** are networks that are local group led. This could include networks such as Youth and Education and Marinet, but also new local-group led networks under the new structure. At a minimum, these networks would have a point of contact with the organisation via a Network Developer, and other staff would obviously be free to join. These are non-priority organisational areas, however there is still a clear link between these networks and the overall aims and principles of the organisation. They would have all the functionality of the staff-led networks.

A proposal has been agreed with campaigns staff that outlines where our existing networks might sit within this new structure. This is summarised in the table below. Networks that are currently "Friends of the Earth hosted", but that are suggested for Category C under the new proposal, are those which campaigns staff no longer have capacity or expertise to support. It is suggested that these become local-group-led networks, but this is dependent on demand and capacity among local groups.

This is not a comprehensive list. It is purely for illustrative purposes and it is expected that more Networks will be added on an ongoing basis. The Regions/nations column is a proposal at this stage and has not been agreed.

Umbrella term ¹ Category	Climate change	Biodiversity	Rights	Green economics	Cross-campaign working	Regions/Nations	International
A	Energy and climate (Climate LCs)	New-look Food Network Waste and resources		<i>Economics network</i>	Activism Forum	<i>Regions and nations overview</i>	International
B	Get Serious Yahoo Group High speed rail	Biofuels	Localism Bill Network			Regional e-news NI e-news Cymru e-news London-Calling NE Network	International Climate Justice. FOEI solidarity action list
C	<u>Aviation²</u> <u>Surface Transport³</u> Nuclear	<u>Trade/Corporate alert</u> Marinet Flouride UK WIN	<i>Rights campaigner network⁴</i> <i>Outreach – working with diverse/disadvantaged</i>	<i>Economics network?</i>	Youth and Education Community fundraising <u>Concerned local</u>	<i>Site battles</i> <i>Sub-regional networks</i>	<u>Forests Biodiversity</u>

¹ These terms relate to the aims in our current Strategic plan.. They may well change although the aims/areas they represent will not.

² Networks that are *italic and underlined* are networks that currently exist in some form, but their placement on this structure would need to be subject to proactive involvement of local group members. Networks that are just *italic* don't currently exist. They have been placed on this structure to give an understanding of where the gaps are and how they could be filled. This would of course require agreement from across teams to implement and establish these new networks.

³ The aviation, surface transport and trade/corporate alert "networks" currently have no or very limited staff input and engagement in them. There is not capacity or a strategic case for the organisation to invest staff time in these issue areas at the present time. Consequently it proposed that these networks are moved over to become local group led networks. Individuals with specialists expertise, including staff members, would still be invited to contribute to these networks.

⁴ We do not currently have data on what the situation is with the Rights e-lists/networks.

		GMOs	<i>communities?</i>		<u>groups forum</u> Coordinators		
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Implementation - how and when

Whilst this project is a recognised major priority for Friends of the Earth, its implementation ran into capacity constraints in 2010 caused by other important website-related work, including setting up the online accounts and re-designing the format of our main website. However this other work is now complete and we expect the Campaigner Networks project implementation to begin in April 2011 (the delay until April is caused by the need to wait for the release of an updated version of the software we will be using).

The first phase of implementation will be detailed scoping work by our IT teams, followed by trial and rollout. A clear timeline will be developed following feedback from the IS team once their scoping work is concluded. The webpage at http://www.foe.co.uk/community/local_groups/feedback/cn_review_20493.html will be updated with the latest progress as we implement the new Networks, but we're hoping to have launched the new system in its entirety by Conference 2011. All local groups and existing local group-led networks will be sent clear information on how to access and make the most of the new Networks, and on how to set up their own Networks, should they wish to, within the new system.

In the meantime, the webpage above will also be updated with the latest work on new Network agreements and processes for setting up Networks, and more detailed information as we have it on what the Networks will look like and how they can be used.

Any comments, feedback or questions relating to these updates can be sent to jenny.thatcher@foe.co.uk.