

Clarification of how staff can communicate effectively with groups in a way that works for everyone

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1. Introduction

We all want groups to be able to get the information they need, from the people that need to give it, at the times they need it. There is no desire to block opportunities for groups to engage in campaign opportunities and no such policy of gatekeeping of opportunities exists. However, we do have a number of ways that we communicate with groups and we need to manage the way we communicate so that the information that is provided is done so in a way that's effective, efficient and easily manageable. As such, we have guidelines for communicating with the groups network. This guidance allows all opportunities to get to groups at the right times through the right channels- to make sure that these opportunities are presented fully and effectively. It is not a case of "gatekeeping" opportunities but simply managing communications.

2. Monthly emails to groups

The primary method for getting information out to local groups – activists and coordinators – is through the monthly e-news system that is managed through and pulled together by Network Developers. This system allows you to put information out to groups in an accessible format and provides a way to link through for more information. It ensures that all groups across England, Wales and Northern Ireland receive a baseline level of quality information regularly which is crucial. (NB Wales' emails go out bi-monthly, in Welsh and English.)

If anyone in the organisation needs to get information out to groups, they can ask to get a slot in this e-newsletter by filling in the [regional communications spreadsheet](#). Details of how and when to do that are [here](#) - and contact the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) in the Activism Team with any queries. **All entries that are high priority or are on organisational priorities will go in to the newsletter** (although if an issue isn't relevant to a certain area, such as a campaign that is not being run in Northern Ireland, it will not be included). If your entry is medium or low priority it may not go in as that depends on how much information is being sent out that month. We trust staff to make an honest assessment on how important their message is.

Most messages you want to communicate out to a large number of groups will go through this channel as staff will usually know what they need to say to groups well in advance of that information needing to go out.

3. **Contact with one group or a few groups**

By Email, phone or post: Any member of staff is free to contact any group member or coordinator any time to talk to them about an issue or email them about something. Where that is about asking a group to do something, we do appreciate the team letting the Network Developer know before or after the contact as they have a role overseeing the activities and welfare of the groups network and so benefit from knowing what is going on. However this isn't a strict rule and we know that often it's unnecessary or impractical. Please use your judgement. LRCs and NDs should be speaking regularly anyway, so in those instances that information can be shared between them. It's also fine to contact a few groups at any one time without passing it by anyone else, although again please do let NDs know where possible.

4. **What if you need to communicate with a large number of groups outside of the monthly emails**

Sometimes staff need to communicate with a large number of groups outside of the standard monthly emails that go out. The nature of a campaigning organisation is such that there needs to be flexibility and reactivity and the right people need to be able to contact activists at the right times. Groups also need to know that those working on the issues that they are interested in or active on can get in touch with them about key opportunities and likewise, they need to know that they will hear about opportunities as they arise.

If you need to get a communication out to a large number of local groups – perhaps most or all of the ones in your regions or even more widely for example - you can. However, there are guidelines for ensuring that these communications are managed properly.

Emails

- **As a rule, mass email communications to groups should only be ones that cannot go in to the organised monthly emails and have a degree of urgency to them that means that they also cannot wait until the next monthly emails.** This is not “gatekeeping” in any negative sense, but a case of ensuring that overall, groups can rely on getting the key information when they need it in a manageable way. We will not block the communication of information to groups, but we do want to ensure that information is communicated properly. If communications go to groups that could have waited and gone in to monthly emails, we will pick that up with staff.

- **If Local and Regional Campaigners or Network Developers** need to communicate to a large number of or all of the groups in their region and that communication cannot wait until the next monthly groups email, they can go ahead. LRCs and NDs have a particular relationship with groups in their region and so should feel able to send these urgent communications on regional issues to groups following these guidelines. LRCs and NDs can contact groups in their region without contacting the other or others in the Activism team first due to the nature of their roles. However, they should inform each other about it beforehand wherever possible and always afterwards if not. If a mass communication can wait until the monthly email it should.
- **Other staff** from campaigns teams and beyond should speak to the Activism Team first before doing an email to a large number of groups as mass emails to all groups is not always the best or most appropriate route to take and it should be taken only in genuinely high priority, urgent circumstances. Please see below about how to make best use of the new Campaign Networks for creating urgent action.

The Activism team needs to ensure that requests being made of groups are clear and manageable and will have an overview of what other communications are being sent to groups. Contact the Senior Activism Coordinator for Campaigns (Jenny Thatcher) if your communication is about a campaign issue; contact the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) for all other organisational messages.

Your request to tell groups about an urgent opportunity will not be blocked (although if it can in fact wait until the next month's newsletters we will often ask that it does). However we will work with you to ensure that your information goes out to the right channels and we may ask that you also mention another campaign opportunity from another team, or that you wait a little bit of time if possible to allow for a different communication to go out. We may also want to chat to you about the activism you are thinking about to ensure that it is fully effective, appropriate and relevant and meets the needs of the network. None of this will be substantial or burdensome though – usually just a quick chat

NB: Where staff are emailing groups about campaign issues that are related to a priority campaign, that should have been agreed by the campaign project group as part of the campaign strategy. This is nothing to do with gatekeeping but about ensuring that our campaigns retain focus and stick to strategy.

Phone rounds

It is possible to arrange for a phone round of a large number of groups. However, we do ask that staff speak to the Network Developer for that region or, if it is beyond a single region, before going ahead, please speak to the Senior Activism Coordinator for Campaigns (Jenny Thatcher) if your phone round is about a campaign issue, or the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) if it's an organisational message. In doing so we can ensure that further key information is passed on to groups in the same call where possible and that any issues or problems with going ahead are identified. Mass phone

rounds are rare and usually either planned well in advance or on a very high priority and very urgent issue.

Paper mailings to groups

It is possible to post information to groups on a mass scale. However, this is usually only worthwhile and legitimate on a very high priority, organisational issue. It's a lot of work, costly and usually not as effective for groups. It's also not the best way to get information out to groups as only coordinators can be mailed and it can take time for information to get to a group. You can tell groups about resources and briefings through the channels of communication above (monthly emails, change your world, community) but a mass postal mailing would need to be justified to go ahead. If it does make sense to do a mailing though, it will be done, at the cost of the team wanting to do the mailing. Talk to the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) to discuss arranging this option.

5. Other channels for communicating with groups

You can also communicate your messages and information to groups through **Change Your World** and through the **Community website**. Contact the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) in the Activism team who can help you get your messages out through these various channels.

We are also in the process of redeveloping the **campaign networks** and soon these will be fantastic and really important way to provide up to date immediate opportunities for action both by groups that are particular interested in the issue that network focuses on or groups that just want to know the range of opportunities across issues that are available. As such, before deciding you need to contact all groups, you should think about whether it's more appropriate to let your specialist network know. You can speak to Jenny Thatcher – Senior Activism Coordinator for campaigns (Jenny Thatcher) - about this.

6. A word of caution on capacity

A lot of staff, including many LRCs and NDs who are most in touch with groups, are also group members themselves and so know that groups have limited capacity and time that they generously invest in to campaigning with Friends of the Earth. Friends of the Earth puts enormous value on the campaigning that groups do from the local level right up to engagement in the national campaigns.

Friends of the Earth's big priority campaigns mean we make big impacts and win big things. Key to that are the activism strategies that engage groups in putting the pressure on at the right places at the right times, together as a network. Groups are asked to engage in a big campaign every year with us alongside them doing their other

campaigning. As such, we do rely on that powerful activism impact on our campaigns and it is what makes us both unique and effective. Often these activism strategies have groups coming together to do events – days of action, press work, lobbying for example – and these moments can be critical to the success of the campaigns. We don't want to deprive groups of opportunities for campaigning on other things at all but we do ask that you bear in mind that if the organisation is working with groups on a major event to build the next stage of a major campaign, that event will be more likely to succeed if groups are able to focus on it. That doesn't mean they shouldn't be told of other opportunities but it does mean you should think about what you ask of groups that are already very busy and when a major campaign is asking groups to help out. It's often best to talk to the Activism Coordinator for the campaign to get a sense of what groups are being asked to engage with.

7. **In short:**

- **Want to contact a group or a coordinator?** – go ahead. Let us know if you can.
- **Want to contact lots of groups or coordinators?** – get it in the next regional email and speak to the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) about other ways to get your message out.
- **Do you need to email a lot of groups but need get it out faster than that?** If you're an LRC or ND, go ahead but let activism know in advance if you can, or afterwards if you can't. If you're from another team, please first talk to the Senior Activism Coordinator for campaigns (Jenny Thatcher) for Campaigns (Jenny Thatcher) if your communication is about a campaign issue, or the Support Coordinator (Jill Andrews) if it's an organisational message and we'll help to make it happen.
- **Do you need to phone or post to a lot of groups but need get it out faster than that?** Talk to the Activism team about it and we'll work with you either to make it happen, or to suggest more appropriate approaches