

building PublicWill

FIVE-PHASE COMMUNICATION APPROACH
TO SUSTAINABLE CHANGE



Metropolitan Group

the power of voice

Contents

Introduction.	1
Defining Public Will.	3
Building Public Will vs. Influencing Public Opinion	6
The Five Phases of Public Will Building	7
<i>Phase One—Framing and defining the problem or need</i>	
<i>Phase Two—Building awareness about the problem or need</i>	
<i>Phase Three—Becoming knowledgeable/transmitting information about where and how the problem can be impacted or changed</i>	
<i>Phase Four—Creating a personal conviction (among key audiences) that change needs to occur and issuing a call to action</i>	
<i>Phase Five—Evaluating while reinforcing</i>	
Conclusion	18

Appendices

Public Will Building Case Study: RiverSmart.	19
Techniques for Building Public Will.	21
1. Pathways to change	
2. Movement building	
3. Audience identification, segmentation and prioritization	
4. Influence mapping	
5. Integrating grassroots and traditional media	
6. Creating personal conviction	
7. Continual evaluation and evolution	
8. Sustainability through reinforcement	
About the authors: Metropolitan Group.	30
Additional Resources	32

After three decades of litigation against tobacco companies with little change in public perception about smoking, the tobacco industry now pays billions for public health programs, smokefree public spaces are the norm, and smokefree restaurants, bars and hotels are in high demand from consumers.

What changed? Public will.

For years, Detroit insisted that it could not produce hybrid vehicles affordably, and that even if it could, there would be no market for the product. In 2004, Americans were putting their names on waiting lists and paying above list price to get hybrids. In 2005 luxury cars joined the hybrid mix.

What changed? Public will.

Twenty-five years ago, organic agricultural products were found exclusively in natural food stores. Today, organic food drives a more than \$20 billion industry, and can be found on the shelves of every major grocery store across the country.

What changed? Public will.

Communication that fuels lasting change and creates sticking power for an issue, idea or point of view is a critical and powerful tool for social change, whether aimed at pushing or supporting decision-makers to change policy; altering the voting, buying or other behavior patterns of private citizens; or triggering a change in the economic, political or social expectations of society.

Public will building is a communication approach that has developed organically through practical experience in social change-focused communication campaigns conducted by the authors. Over the last decade, Metropolitan Group has been engaged by numerous public sector, nonprofit and socially responsible business clients to develop communication campaigns to impact attitudes and behaviors and to ultimately create social change. Often, the issues we are engaged in require long-term commitment and reinforcement for the change to last. Through our work we have learned and refined effective approaches that establish platforms for more sustainable change. We have distilled our experience with this work into a communication framework and underlying principles we have named **public will building**. This article shares our learning; defines **public will building**; creates an understanding of the differences between this approach and public opinion and social marketing-based communication; highlights the five phases of **public will building**; and explores the techniques it uses.

Defining Public Will

What is Public Will?

Public will building is a communication approach that builds public support for social change by integrating grassroots outreach methods with traditional mass media tools in a process that connects an issue to the existing, closely held values of individuals and groups. This approach leads to deeper public understanding and ownership of social change. It creates new and lasting community expectations that shape the way people act, think and behave.

Public will building:

- Connects people to an issue through their existing, closely held values, rather than trying to change their values.
- Results in long-term attitudinal shifts that are manifested in individuals taking new or different actions that collectively create change.
- Is achieved when a sufficient number of community members and thought leaders have galvanized around an issue to form a new or different set of fundamental community expectations.

How is Public Will Built?

Public will is built by connecting people to an issue through their *existing* closely held values, triggering long-term attitudinal shifts in people's ranking of issues in their own personal values system — shifts that are manifested in individuals taking new or different actions that collectively create change in systems and societies. This approach to change recognizes the tremendous power of individual and community values in framing individual and community attitudes and behaviors. It recognizes that it is unreasonable to try to change people's values and focuses instead on identifying and understanding how existing values can serve as links to an issue.

CASE IN POINT

Thirty years ago, smoking when and where a person chose was considered a right, closely linked to the normative American value of individual rights. Smokers and the tobacco industry were deeply entrenched. However, emerging research about the dangers of secondhand smoke gave advocates of smokefree public spaces an opportunity to reframe the argument. Using public will building techniques, advocates demonstrated that exposure to secondhand smoke infringed on others' individual right to protect their health. Leveraging the closely held value placed on self-determination and individual rights, the priority became personal health over personal choice. Today, smokefree spaces are the norm.

Phases of Public Will Building

Shaping public will on any issue requires a multidimensional approach to changing attitudes and impacting behavior. The five phases of *public will building* define both the steps that organizers must go through in order to trigger widespread *public will building* and those that audiences must go through in order to change their internal constructs. The five phases of *public will building* are:

Phase 1: Framing and defining the problem or need

Phase 2: Building awareness about the problem or need

Phase 3: Becoming knowledgeable/transmitting information about where and how the problem can be impacted or changed

Phase 4: Creating a personal conviction (among key audiences) that change needs to occur and issuing a call to action

Phase 5: Evaluating while reinforcing

Each of these phases is discussed in more detail later in this article.

The Four Principles of Public Will Building

Public will building is grounded in four underlying principles, which together form the foundation for successful development of social change efforts using this model. While each of the principles is independently present in many other forms of social marketing and communication, the synergy and strength of the combined four underlying principles make *public will building* distinctive.

1. Connecting through closely held values

Values trump data when it comes to decision-making. People make decisions consciously and unconsciously based on their values, and then utilize data to rationalize and support their choice. For individuals to maintain a lasting commitment to an issue as a personal priority, and to hold a conviction that leads to action, the issue must connect to closely held personal values. Individual choices to speak out or take action on an issue flow from resonance between the issue and a person's core value system.

We can and do make isolated decisions based upon specific needs or situations. However, in order to sustain commitment and take actions that may involve risk, an issue must connect with a person's core values. *Public will building* acknowledges that trying to change values or teach new ones is extremely difficult and often threatening. By finding an existing core value and linking an issue to it, a group or individual advocating for social change can create a strong and engaging platform for communication that results in long-term attitudinal and behavioral shifts supported through decisive action.

Establishing the connection with closely held values is best accomplished by designing messages based on those values. As with other forms of persuasive communication, this is achieved through the selection of stories that carry the message, the choice of language used in everything from the name of the effort to the style of the writing, and the selection of messengers who share values with the audiences.

2. *Respecting cultural context*

To engage in any meaningful discourse involving closely held values and to create ownership of an issue, understanding and working within a person's or group's cultural context is a necessity. It is important for public will organizers to understand the dynamics of power, language, relationships, values, traditions, worldview, and decision-making in a given cultural context. This understanding impacts organizers' effective selection of leadership, messengers, messages, strategies, tactics and tools. Working in accord with the cultural context is an important aspect of any successful communication effort. However, it is essential in *public will building* because critical aspects of the work rely upon audiences connecting an issue with their core values and upon engaging grassroots and community-based leadership.

3. *Including target audiences in development and testing*

Building public will depends upon creating legitimate ownership and engagement in the process by the people impacted by an issue in order to result in action and sustained motivation. The *public will building* process therefore must involve truly representative target audiences in the research, design, development and testing of key strategies and messages. Inclusion of audiences in all aspects of an effort ensures authenticity, clarity of message and credibility of messengers. By seeking a deeper level of involvement from their audiences, public will organizers garner perspective and ideas while building a base of grassroots support throughout the planning and implementation process.

4. *Integrating grassroots and traditional communication methods*

Connecting to values is most effectively accomplished through relationships of trust and relies upon direct grassroots outreach where peers, friends, neighbors, family members, co-workers and other trusted community members connect members of their circles of influence or social networks to an issue through a motivating value, and actively seek their support and action. *Public will building* efforts integrate grassroots outreach with advertising and other traditional communication methods to create a fertile environment for outreach and to motivate and reinforce focus on the issue, key messages and call to action. This integrated approach is a major distinguishing factor between *public will building* and more general public awareness building work.

Building Public Will vs. Influencing Public Opinion

Short-term Wins vs. Long-term Gains

Too often, social change communication is focused on short-term wins and addressing symptoms, rather than tackling the root causes of problems or needs. Such efforts are concentrated on changing public opinion, a short-term gain.

Public opinion-based campaigns are designed to move a target audience to share an opinion linked to a specific issue. Campaigns designed to influence public opinion can be very effective in winning or influencing specific decisions and actions during a specific time frame—such as electing a candidate or passing an initiative. However, this very strength creates vulnerability because public opinion can be effectively swayed and changed back and forth utilizing the same techniques. Communication to sway public opinion tends to identify a winning message for the short term and drive it home through a concentration of efforts on the most expedient delivery mechanism, often placing the vast majority of resources into mass media. By its nature, public opinion-based communication seeks to narrow the discourse and discourage personal exploration of and engagement with an issue.

In contrast, public will-based strategies focus on long-term change built over time by engaging broad-based grassroots support to influence individual and institutional change. While public will-based strategies also have clear and measurable goals, they focus on developing a sustainable platform for change and thus invest in greater audience engagement.

Often the need for clear and immediate change (victory at the ballot box, etc.) drives the decision to use public opinion-based strategies. This approach often leads to a series of zero-sum wins and losses related to an issue that create specific changes without instilling new community norms or changing baseline expectations about an issue. Further, the messages that are effective in winning a one-time decision can create divisions and/or undermine movement building.

WHEN THE SHORT-TERM MESSAGE DOES LONG-TERM HARM

Messages used to fight industrial water polluters have “shut off” many of the big industrial offenders, which means that the primary source of water pollution now comes from non-point source pollution—the individual actions of the general public. However, the same messages that convinced the public that the main cause of water pollution is big industry have resulted in individuals and families discounting the possibility that they personally have any impact on water Quality. In addition, the messages have set up an environment vs. economy dichotomy, which has limited value for a common-ground approach.

The Five Phases of Public Will Building

The Public Will Building Framework

Shaping public will on any issue requires a multidimensional approach to changing attitudes and impacting behavior. The five phases of *public will building* define both the steps that organizers must go through in order to trigger wide spread public will building and that audiences must go through in order to change their internal constructs. The phases of *public will building* are:



Phase 1: Framing and defining the problem or need

Phase 2: Building awareness about the problem or need

Phase 3: Becoming knowledgeable/transmitting information about where and how the problem can be impacted or changed

Phase 4: Creating a personal conviction (among key audiences) that change needs to occur and issuing a call to action

Phase 5: Evaluating while reinforcing

With any given issue, audience segments are at different levels of interest and engagement, so the phases do not necessarily occur simultaneously for all audiences. Organizers will often interact with audiences segments across the spectrum of the *public will building* phases. For each phase we examine the activities of organizers and the engagement of audiences. We will illustrate each phase with one example — *RiverSmart* — that carries through each of the phases, as well as an alternative example that demonstrates very different needs and issues. In the techniques section in the Appendices, you will find more information about tactics and tools that help implement a *public will building* initiative.

FRAMING THE PROBLEM

PHASE 1

Phase 1: Framing and defining the problem or need

Individuals and organizations define issues and needs in relationship to the context that they are in and the relationship of each issue and need to their personal values. In the early stages of awareness, audiences self-define issues as having relevance and/or impact. The definition phase creates the context in which an issue or problem is viewed.

Organizers

In this phase, organizers clarify the problem that needs to be addressed by conducting research to develop a clear knowledge base about:

- The causes of the problem
- The cultural context
- The entities that have the ability to impact it
- Current activities and players involved in seeking and/or blocking change
- Gaps in the change effort
- The impacts of the problem (economic, social, political, environmental)

Based upon a clear definition of the problem, the players and the impacts of the problem, organizers evaluate pathways and identify the best one to achieve change. Pathways to change can range from passing new legislation or adjusting administrative rules and procedures to motivating voluntary compliance and market or social pressure that mandate change. The appropriate organizational model and leadership needs for the *public will building* effort are established based upon the pathway selected.

Audiences

In the first phase of *public will building*, the pioneering “audience” is the group that becomes aware and frames an issue as having relevance—the early adopters of a *public will building* initiative. For example, many mainstream audiences’ early awareness of clean water needs stemmed from awareness of the relationship between drinking water and health. Their definition (framing) of the problem is the need for clean drinking water for themselves and their communities.

Phase 1: Framing and defining the problem or need

Key audiences are:

Moving from not aware of the problem, to early awareness that frames the issue as one of relevance to them

Public will organizers are:

Conducting research about the problem

Determining the values with which it connects and the audiences for whom it has the most relevance

Identifying potential change agents and pathways to change

Framing the issue so it has relevance

EXAMPLES

RiverSmart: *In the United States, over 3,000 local groups are working to preserve water quality and the health of their local watershed. One of their primary challenges is educating the public about the source of water pollution—the impact of millions of individual actions (using fertilizer on personal property, rinsing paint brushes or changing oil where pollutants can leak into the street or run into a drain, etc.). Based on research about Americans’ attitudes on the environment and water quality, RiverSmart organizers framed the issue in a positive light—focusing on the easy ways that people could make a difference. In addition, because research showed that people take environmental action primarily because of concern about their health and their families’ health, the organizers made explicit the connection between health and rivers: 50 percent of drinking water in this country comes from rivers.*

Healthy Birth Initiative: *When the Healthy Birth Initiative was preparing to launch a campaign to reduce the rate of infant mortality and the number of low-birthweight babies being born in certain areas, an early assumption of the organizers was that women who were delivering these low-birth weight babies did NOT know what they needed to do to have a healthy pregnancy. Research, however, found that the problem was not lack of knowledge, but lack of support in practicing healthy behaviors. As a result, organizers framed the problem as pregnant women needing support from the men in their lives, and subsequently built a campaign based upon that frame.*



**BUILDING
AWARENESS**



**PHASE
2**

Phase 2: Building awareness about the problem or need

Organizers

Organizers are building awareness about the problem or need through outreach aimed at educating, raising awareness and building interest about the issue by connecting it with existing core value(s) of priority audiences.

To build awareness, organizers identify the audience segments that can impact the issue and gather information about each segment's level of awareness, relationship to the issue, personal values and sources of information. This information helps organizers prioritize the audiences, develop effective messages and select the best channels to deliver the messages and build awareness. Messages are tested with audiences for resonance and impact and are customized with audience involvement to work within the cultural context of each audience segment.

Information is conveyed through integrated grassroots outreach and traditional media techniques. Grassroots outreach provides direct person-to-person communication to connect the issue to existing values, deliver messages with veracity and validity, and create engagement and ownership.

Traditional communication tools such as media relations and advertising and other communication tools (brochures, pamphlets, Web content, events and activities, etc.) reinforce direct outreach by supporting early adopters in their commitment to champion the issue, creating a fertile environment in which others become ready and willing to discuss the issue, and providing environmental cues that provide a sense of being part of a larger movement.

Audiences

Once an issue or problem is defined, audience awareness and knowledge must increase in order to raise the importance and relevance of the issue. By gaining deeper awareness of the issue, including examples of impact(s), underlying causes, supporters and opponents, and how it relates to core values, audiences become ready to “own” the issue. Also in this phase, audiences are participating in research conducted by public will organizers (and participating in this research is one mechanism through which their awareness is raised).

Phase 2: Building awareness about the problem or need

Key audiences are:

Participating in testing (messages, campaign collateral, etc.)
Gaining awareness and depth of information through trusted relationships, affiliations, media, etc.

Public will organizers are:

Preparing: segmenting, learning about and prioritizing audiences, crafting messages, identifying communication channels
Attracting early adopters and key influencers
Building awareness through grassroots and traditional media

EXAMPLES

RiverSmart: Organizers of the RiverSmart campaign had access to a ready-made audience—the members of 3,000 plus watershed groups across the country. In the early phases of the campaign, organizers provided tools to the watershed groups to help them begin raising awareness of the issue. In addition to this grassroots outreach, organizers utilized earned media and a community-based advertising campaign to raise awareness about the connection linking healthy rivers, individual action and clean drinking water.

Foster care transition: Each year, more than 500,000 young adults turn 18 and “transition” out of the nation’s foster care system, often without the skills or support network they need to be successful living on their own. In 1999, the John Chafee Independent Living Care Act was passed to provide federal matching dollars to states to help them establish effective transition services, but in the early years few states took advantage of this money. Child welfare advocates identified key audiences as a broad range of community members from education, business, health/mental health, housing and other community resources. Through direct outreach strategies, organizers educated key audiences about the needs of youth in transition and the important role the community could play in supporting youth and advocating for collaborative, state-based programming. These programs would enable states to receive the maximum available federal dollars to help support youth transition programs. Key awareness-raising strategies included forums, advocacy trainings, interagency partnerships, and the convening of community resource committees. Increased awareness of the issue led to direct advocacy efforts.



Phase 3: Becoming knowledgeable/transmitting information about where and how the problem can be impacted or changed

Organizers

During the third phase, outreach moves from focusing on raising awareness of the problem to providing information about how change can occur and what needs to be done to trigger change. Since audiences are aware of the issue and are seeking ways to have an impact, organizers now focus on providing specific information about how to impact change through personal actions (environmental, parenting, health and other behaviors) and through community and institutional actions (voting, voicing support or opposition to a policy, purchasing behaviors/voting with one's dollars, adopting new policies, practices or procedures, etc.).

Audiences

Once audiences are aware of an issue and are gaining knowledge of its importance, relevancy and impact, they want to know how to make a difference. They seek answers to questions including:

- Who can impact the issue?
- What organizations are responsible and able to make a difference?
- What can I do about it?

As they find the answers to these questions, audiences begin to connect their related values and awareness of the issue with knowledge of what they can do about it.

Phase 3: Becoming knowledgeable/transmitting information about where and how the problem can be impacted or changed

Key audiences are:

Hearing about the issue through multiple channels with identification of specific desired changes and the mechanisms for change

Public will organizers are:

Transmitting information with specifics on desired changes and the mechanisms for change

EXAMPLES

RiverSmart: After raising awareness about the source of the nation's water pollution problem and who could make a difference, RiverSmart issued a call to action for both individual and institutional voluntary action. Individuals were asked to change their behaviors in small ways every day—for instance, by turning off the water while they brushed their teeth. Institutions were asked to change their procedures and thus behaviors related to property maintenance, water use, education programs, etc.

Socially responsible investing: The socially responsible investment industry has successfully raised awareness among key audiences that the actions and business practices of companies impact a variety of issues, ranging from the environment to health and human rights. Financial institutions that sell socially responsible investment products transmit information on how to impact these issues by communicating that individuals and institutions can support their values and vision of the world by choosing where they invest their money.

**CREATING A
PERSONAL
CONVICTION**

**PHASE
4**

Phase 4: Creating a personal conviction (among key audiences) that change needs to occur and issuing a call to action

Organizers

In order to help individuals make a personal commitment, *public will building* organizers are delivering clear call-to-action messages that encourage both making a lasting commitment and taking specific actions that impact the issue.

Using the integrated grassroots and traditional media approach, the call to action should be delivered by champions and ambassadors (see page 25) as direct requests and supported through messages in the media and communication materials. The call to action should be framed with an awareness of the overall context so that individual commitments and changes are positioned as part of new and aspirational community expectations. The call to action should primarily drive a particular choice and behavior that create greater commitment to the issue. In addition to more traditional calls to action that include advocacy, purchasing and voting decisions, organizers may encourage audiences to make pledges, endorse core positions and identify themselves as part of a movement.

Audiences

In this phase, audiences have a strong awareness of the issue, understand how it connects to their values, and see how they can impact it. Now, audience members are moved to make a personal commitment that change needs to occur and that they need to be part of it.

This is the critical stage where individuals make a choice (conscious or subconscious) either to own and impact an issue or to merely be aware of it. This commitment to creating change goes beyond a choice in a specific election or being for or against a particular piece of legislation. Commitment in this phase means that people understand the problem—and its root causes—and dedicate themselves to working for change through a variety of actions. It is in this phase that the issue becomes a touchpoint in individual choice-making, influencing how people vote, what they purchase and to what positions they lend or deny their support. It is at this choice point that public will is established.

Phase 4: Creating a personal conviction (among key audiences)

Key audiences are:

Gaining a sense of ownership/ dedication to impacting the problem and its causes

Identifying specific actions to take

Committing themselves to making a difference

Taking action and recruiting others to take action

Public will organizers are:

Providing tangible opportunities for committed audiences to take action

EXAMPLES

RiverSmart: *The RiverSmart campaign used a call to action that both drove specific action and created a context for individuals to move personal responsibility for clean drinking water into their mindset as a community expectation. The campaign's call to action was Be RiverSmart, which by its nature asks the audience to "be" rather than "do," asks the audience to think/be aware of their choices and feel good being connected to the way the community should be in regard to the issue. The call to action was customized with additional messages to drive specific actions including, "Is Your Home RiverSmart?" and "Is Your Business RiverSmart?" All calls to action included 10 easy tips for specific and immediate actions people could take to Be RiverSmart. Audiences were encouraged to take the online RiverSmart pledge, which created commitment and established audience members as ambassadors.*

Militia recruitment: *In the early 1990s, Western states found themselves facing a rise in militia recruitment, and a subsequent rise in hate and property crimes. Public will organizers framed this issue by acknowledging people's right to be afraid and angry, but issued a call to action that required a line to be drawn in the sand—that fear and anger are no excuse for lawlessness. Using institutional partners such as schools, churches, police and civic organizations, public will organizers called for people to fight the fear together, and to reject lawlessness as going too far. Ultimately, community leaders and individuals who were being targeted for recruitment reached a conviction that acts of violence and vandalism were un-American.*

EVALUATING
WHILE
REINFORCING

PHASE
5

Phase 5: Evaluating while reinforcing

Organizers

Public will building organizers must evaluate the approach being used and its impact while continually reinforcing individuals who have made the choice to take action. By evaluating messages, activities and results, and linking successes and failures to specific strategies, organizers can make adjustments to strategy and modify the approach to achieve greater impact.

Evaluation allows for the development of new tools and strategies to make supporters more effective. Unlike many public opinion-based efforts where the key focus is on undecided audiences, public will organizers focus significant attention on ensuring that both grassroots and traditional media communication reinforce audiences that have made the choice to act. This reinforcement component is critical to *public will building* because it helps ensure that once people have moved an issue into their sphere of priorities, they are reminded of their commitment and continue to see it as part of how they and their community define themselves.

Audiences

Once individuals have taken action, they evaluate the results of their action, become increasingly aware of the positions and actions of others in relationship to the issue, and either reinforce their decision and deepen their conviction or question their decision and make adjustments to their actions. The more they feel reinforced in their choice, the more they will take actions consistent with their conviction to help drive change and influence others.

Phase 5: Evaluating while reinforcing

Key audiences are:

Being exposed to messages/actions that validate their choices and encourage continued action and the recruitment of others

Public will organizers are:

Evaluating effectiveness of tools and messages
Adapting as necessary
Supporting/reinforcing audiences that have taken action

EXAMPLES

RiverSmart: *The RiverSmart campaign focused significant effort on providing reinforcement to its base. The public will organizers provided ambassadors and champions with regular project updates; highlights of successes (overall and by individual partners); periodic live and teleconference training opportunities; an annual conference to build community, share best practices and reinforce commitment; and online updates to individuals who took the pledge. Further, the campaign asked individuals and organizations to provide stories of their efforts and successes, and selected promising stories in which to invest national resources. RiverSmart pitched these local stories to the media and/or featured them on its website. By highlighting the efforts of the people and organizations in the field, RiverSmart better conveyed its message to external audiences and provided acknowledgment, benefit and reinforcement to its partners.*

Fair Workplace Project: *In many parts of America, it is legal to discriminate in workplaces on the basis of sexual orientation. Basic Rights Oregon launched a campaign to motivate employers to commit to being “Fair Workplaces” by publicly including equal protections based on sexual orientation in their human resources policies. Organizers focused on ensuring reinforcement to turn committed companies into advocates—providing plaques for workplaces, media coverage of positive stories, a business awards banquet, and consistent e-mail and print updates to participating companies. The effort gained critical mass and is now viewed as a general expectation in the Oregon business community.*

Conclusion

Public will building is a powerful approach to creating sustainable change.

Public will building clarifies needs, builds understanding of causes and issues, connects issues with existing values, and identifies the best pathways to change. It develops effective leadership and organizational models, identifies and prioritizes audiences, integrates traditional media and grassroots outreach. The five-phase process attracts and enlists committed champions and ambassadors. These key influencers are moved to conviction, their conviction becomes action, and their action garners the conviction and action of others. As change occurs, evaluation and reinforcement support the efforts of early adopters and convert them to ambassadors. Ultimately, this establishes a new set of normative community expectations.

The *public will building* approach achieves high advancement of mission with high return on investment by leveraging the efforts and resources of supporters, by selecting strategies that have long-term impact, and by linking issues with existing values to create long-term commitment. It creates a sustainable platform for change and moves an issue to become a touchpoint for an individual's voting, purchasing and other decision-making. The techniques that follow in the Appendices provides tips and tactical options for *public will building* and other sustainable change efforts.

Advocating and creating change through the *public will building* process establishes the values-based commitment and the rationale for taking action on an issue as part of the expectations of a community. This makes it more likely that changes will last and that additional and perhaps more difficult challenges will be surmounted in the future. Due to its capacity- and movement-building nature, the *public will building* process also grows leaders and networks that have greater voice and power with which to impact other issues and unleash the potential of their communities.

Public Will Building Case Study: RiverSmart

In the United States, over 3,000 local groups are working to preserve water quality and the health of their local watershed. One of their primary challenges is educating the public about the source of water pollution—the impact of millions of individual actions (using fertilizer on personal property, rinsing paint brushes or changing oil where pollutants can leak into the street or run into a drain, etc.).

FRAMING THE PROBLEM

PHASE 1

Based on research about American’s attitudes on the environment and water quality (Americans care deeply about the health impacts of clean water, love rivers, don’t understand their personal role in the problem and are less likely to take action if they are made to feel bad or guilty), *RiverSmart* organizers framed the issue in a positive light—focusing on the easy ways that people could make a difference. In addition, because research showed that people take environmental action mainly due to concern about their health and their families’ health, the organizers made explicit the connection between health and rivers: 50 percent of drinking water in this country comes from rivers.

BUILDING AWARENESS

PHASE 2

The organizers of the *RiverSmart* campaign had access to a ready-made audience—the members of 3,000 plus watershed groups across the country. In the early phases of the campaign, organizers provided tools to the watershed groups to help them begin raising awareness of the issue. In addition to this grassroots outreach, organizers utilized earned media and a community-based advertising campaign to raise awareness about the connection linking healthy rivers, individual action and clean drinking water.

BECOMING KNOWLEDGEABLE / TRANSMITTING INFORMATION

PHASE 3

After raising awareness about the source of the nation’s water pollution problem and who could make a difference, *RiverSmart* identified the solution as being both individual and institutional voluntary action. Individuals were asked to change their behaviors in small ways every day—for instance, by turning off the water while they brushed their teeth—in order to impact the problem. Institutions were asked to change their procedures and thus behaviors related to property maintenance, water use, education programs, etc.

CREATING A PERSONAL CONVICTION

PHASE 4

The *RiverSmart* campaign used a call to action that both drove specific action and created a context for individuals to move individual responsibility for clean drinking water into their mindset as a personal conviction and community expectation. The campaigns call to action was *Be RiverSmart*, which by its nature asks the audience to “be” rather than “do,” asks the

audience to think/be aware of their choices and feel good being connected to the way the community should be in regard to the issue. The call to action was customized with additional messages to drive specific action, including “Is Your Home *RiverSmart*?” and “Is Your Business *RiverSmart*?” All calls to action included 10 easy tips for specific and immediate actions people could take to *Be RiverSmart*. Audiences were encouraged to take the online *RiverSmart* pledge that created commitment and established audience members as ambassadors.

EVALUATING
WHILE
REINFORCING

PHASE
5

The *RiverSmart* campaign focused significant effort on providing reinforcement to its base. The public will organizers provided ambassadors and champions with regular project updates; highlights of successes (overall and by individual partners); periodic live and teleconference training opportunities; an annual conference to build community, share best practices and reinforce commitment; and online updates to individuals who took the pledge. Further, the campaign asked individuals and organizations to provide stories of their efforts and successes and selected promising stories in which to invest national resources. *RiverSmart* pitched these local stories to the media and/or featured them on its website. By highlighting the efforts of the people and organizations in the field, *RiverSmart* better conveyed its message to external audiences and provided acknowledgment, benefit and reinforcement to its partners. *RiverSmart* also evaluated which local and national efforts had the greatest impact, adjusted the allocation of resources accordingly, and focused on sharing and replicating learnings from successful strategies.

Techniques for Building Public Will

The *public will building* model integrates a complex set of theories from communication, social marketing, community organizing and engagement. However, the greater depth and breadth of *public will building* requires several fundamentals that warrant particular attention due to their unique application in the process. The sections below focus on these key *public will building* techniques and indicate the phase(s) in which they occur.

1. Pathways to Change—Public Will Building Phase 1

Selecting the best pathway to achieve the desired change relies on:

- An analysis of where audiences are in the stages of change
- The power in the culture of the values to which the issue will be connected
- The approach that best balances achievable and demonstrable results with true impact significant enough to ignite normative expectations and aspiration

Identification of the allies and opponents of the desired change, their reasons and the strength of their positions on the issue, the ability of sponsors to leverage and drive the change process, and the cultural context in which the change is sought all need to be considered in the selection of the best pathway. Pathway options include:

1. *Seek voluntary change as a precursor or alternative to mandated change.*

Where administrative decision-making is used to demonstrate the efficacy of alternative approaches and policies or where business and/or labor elects to make changes.

Example: Fast-tracking and streamlining of permitting and licensing procedures by public sector administrators and conservation of water and energy by consumers are examples of voluntary actions that can test or pilot the potential for mandated change.

2. *Relate change to the value for which there is the greatest agreement.*

Where the initial change selected as the focus has significant common ground and is used as a first step to establish trust and results.

Example: The establishment of smokefree workplaces was one of the first major changes in the United States' "tobacco wars." Workplaces went smokefree long before public spaces, because of common ground agreement that individuals without freedom of movement (workers who are assigned to a work space) deserve the right to make their own choices about their health, including not wanting to inhale smoke.

3. *Build a new status quo and then legislate long-term change.*

Where key influencers can create enough grassroots voluntary action and market/social pressure on the issue that the normative way of operating is changed and legislation is used to codify it.

Examples: Voluntary carbon reduction actions, sourcing of recycled paper, supply chain auditing and the use of certified forest products are all examples of pioneering behavior moving to the mainstream and legislation following the new realities in the marketplace.

4. *Seek mandatory change (policy, education and enforcement).*

Where the need to remove barriers and to establish change that will create consequences and costs for vested interests requires policy mandates with enforcement authority through the legislative or judicial process.

Examples: Environmental regulation of industrial polluters, changes in capital requirements for new businesses, and elimination of duplicative tax structures all require policy change.

2. Movement Building—Public Will Building Phase 1

The goal of *public will building* is to create long-term change and requires selection of the right leadership and organizational model to best guide the desired change in a given environment.

Leadership Types

Based upon the change desired and the factors outlined in the Pathways to Change section, organizers need to clarify the types of leader(s) needed for success. Different efforts may need different leadership types at different times as they evolve. This may be accomplished by having different leaders or by the same individuals evolving their style of leadership to fit the changing needs of a project. Several types of leaders have been defined by numerous management theorists including:

The visionary—helps others recognize a new idea or possibility. This is often the type of leader needed when key challenges to success include lack of recognition that there is a problem, hopelessness that change can occur, or lack of ability to envision aspirational change due to oppression or a sense of being powerless. In these instances, it is critical that the cause has a leader who can not only garner attention for the issue but can also inspire others to envision a better reality and believe that change is possible. Initiators at the beginning of a process most commonly play this role. Visionaries can evolve to playing the role of agitator, though often the visionary transitions the leadership role to an agitator who advances the cause more aggressively.

The agitator—demands that the issue gets on the table, channels the frustration and readiness for change that already exists in others, illustrates the costs of not embracing change. The agitator often demands extreme change from which compromise (beyond what many had thought possible) is negotiated. This role is played during the phase when the most aggressive change efforts are being championed. It is rare that the person in this role can transition into the next leadership role required, the diplomat.

The diplomat—brings all parties to the table, is able to find the common ground, identifies areas for compromise, engages the power structure in being part of the process and develops shared ownership of the issue and required change. The diplomat is often seen as a sustainer of change and as an incremental change advocate. It is possible for the diplomat to transition to the role of manager, but frequently the diplomat becomes bored with the role of manager and will seek new avenues for bridge building outside the movement. Diplomats often are responsible for extending the reach of a given social change agenda to new audiences.

The manager—leverages the skills, connections and resources of others dedicated to change, creates systems that reinforce the commitments that have been made, ensures that the impacts of change are reinvested in sustaining work on the issue, and serves as the long-range strategist who moves the normative community expectations in a succession of logical changes. The manager is a sustainer. While often the profile of the movement is lower during the manager's tenure, the role is vital to the long-term nature of *public will building* efforts. Often when a manager leaves the role, others engaged may find themselves seeking visionary or agitator personalities to reinvigorate the change movement.

Early awareness of leadership needs can help public will organizers identify and recruit the right mix of other people to work on the effort and fill in the gaps. It is important to be aware of the need for different leadership attributes at different stages of building public will and to be willing and able to transition the style of the leader(s).

Often, there is a need for various styles of leadership at the same time. For example, the agitator and diplomat can make a very effective team to push the envelope on an issue while garnering actual change. It is not unusual to find that the founders of a movement possess passion and vision, but do not possess the full spectrum of leadership styles needed. Effective advocates will recognize this in themselves and bring in the styles that are needed to achieve success.

Organizational Structure

Determining and developing the appropriate organizational structure to facilitate progress should be based upon the same criteria as the selection of leadership.

Questions to consider include:

- How long does the effort need to be sustained?
- Do we need participants to represent constituencies or to serve as open members of a brain trust?
- What is the level of commitment we can ask for and garner?
- Based upon whom we aim to influence, what structure will be the most powerful and provide the most leverage?

Some of the more typical options for organizational structure include:

Network—an affiliation of individuals and organizations that join around a common interest in which each member makes commitments and participates on a case-by-case basis.

Coalition—a collection of organizations committed to a common issue/cause (often for a defined period of time or through the achievement of specific change(s)). Each member has made clear commitments to participate and generally represent the point of view and needs of a constituency. Members carry the responsibility of communicating to and activating their constituency.

Alliance—a long-term coalition dedicated to an issue that will encompass many individual efforts and which is central to the mission of all members.

Initiative—a time-specific or limited-scope project for which individuals and organizations make a one-time commitment.

Stand-alone entity—an organization dedicated to working on an issue for the long term, often supported by and working to coordinate the efforts of other organizations that serve as participants in initiatives, networks and coalitions formed by the entity.

3. Audience Identification, Segmentation and Prioritization— Public Will Building Phase 2

Within each audience group there is a spectrum of attitudes and levels of interest and awareness about a given issue. Understanding this spectrum of interest helps identify those most receptive to the message; most likely to take action and make behavioral change; and most likely to encourage change in others. The same analysis also identifies audience segments that are unlikely to change. Achieving lasting social change depends on first reaching audience members who will be early adopters and whose involvement will have the greatest impact on moving others to take action.

To understand how best to connect with audience segments and identify where they are in the *public will building* phases, audience research focuses on identifying each segment's:

- Needs
- Values that connect with the issue
- Key levers for action, points of resistance
- Competing values
- Trusted messengers and conduits of information
- Levels of commitment to creating specific change(s)

Using this analysis, public will organizers segment an audience based upon each segment's relationship to the issue, readiness for action and potential to impact the selected pathway to change. Once segmentation is accomplished, each audience is prioritized with respect to goals and timeline for the effort. Generally, efforts in *public will building* campaigns efforts are focused on providing a fertile environment and easy-to-use communication tools so that audience members in the later phases of *public will building* (conviction/action and reinforcement) can reach and influence audiences in the earlier phases. Both the mass media and grassroots aspects of the approach reach and move audience members in the building awareness phase.

4. Influence Mapping—Public Will Building Phase 2

Influence mapping is a technique that helps focus outreach and grassroots implementation. It can be completed both at the macro level (determining what individuals and organizations have significant influence with each major audience segment) and at an individual level (determining the sphere of influence for each key champion we have identified). This technique is useful to identify the most powerful links to activate individuals, institutions and communities.

To map spheres of influence, organizers first look at each priority audience segment and identify the voices that have credibility with and the respect and trust of the audience—we call this validity of voice. Those with validity of voice can include respected individuals, formal and informal leaders (particularly important based upon the cultural context), media and other preferred communication channels, trusted advisors, and members of business, civic, faith and advocacy organizations. Based upon this initial charting, people can then be categorized as potential champions or ambassadors.

Champions are individuals/organizations that are recognized formal or informal leaders who have significant influence, mechanisms and capacity for outreach. They have the ability to recruit and encourage participation of significant audience segments.

Ambassadors are individuals/organizations that commit to exerting influence in their work and/or personal and civic lives. They generally are early adopters of an issue who will encourage participation and engagement of others in their close circle.

After charting the influence maps for each segment it is then good to repeat the exercise to look individually at each champion and ambassador and to map each person's specific sphere of influence on audience segments, organizations, communities and other individual champions. Public will organizers can base the prioritization and order of outreach on the individuals and organizations that have the greatest potential to be champions and/or have the reach and trust as ambassadors to impact a critical early audience.

5. Integrating Grassroots and Traditional Media— Public Will Building Phases 2 and 3

Public will building integrates high-profile media and partnership strategies with grassroots social movement techniques. Traditional social marketing/public opinion campaigns often put the lion’s share of planning and resources into the media components, with the grassroots treated as fill-in or a low budget priority.

When the goal is to connect an issue with existing closely held values, grassroots outreach (person-to-person contact) is imperative. For audiences to interact with and relate to a message at a deep personal level, establishing trust, engagement, discourse and “connection” are imperative. Ensuring that individuals and groups in the “conviction” and “reinforcement” phases are empowered and enabled to carry the messages to others leverages the most valuable asset of a cause—existing trusted relationships. Personal outreach that directly engages peers and invites them to join with the person making the “ask” turns “passive shareholders” of an issue into “activist investors” for change.

Integrated grassroots action, media and other traditional communication tools (brochures, posters, handbills, websites, blogs, etc.) are utilized to achieve two goals. The first goal is to create a fertile environment for grassroots connections by creating awareness of the issue and establishing that there is significant interest and momentum behind it. The second is to motivate and reinforce individuals who have made the commitment to take action. Media presence provides champions and ambassadors with direct motivation and encouragement and builds their confidence by conveying that they are part of something that has currency and importance in their community.

To be effective in this integrated approach, all communication tools need to be developed and tested with the involvement and feedback of grassroots champions and ambassadors to ensure validity and reliability. Furthermore, tools and messages must be provided to grassroots partners in formats that allow easy incorporation into their communication (e.g., camera-ready artwork for newsletters, easily co-branded content for websites, talking points with current stories and examples of relevance). Moreover, the timing and placement of media should support outreach efforts by grassroots champions, including key events such as legislative days, advocacy pushes, conferences and summits, key cycles in government decision-making, high-profile international visits and events, etc. Finally, media outreach serves to encourage individuals and organizations that are not yet on the radar of the campaign to identify themselves and engage with the effort as new ambassadors and champions.

6. Creating Personal Conviction—Public Will Building Phase 4

In the fourth phase of *public will building*, audience members make a personal commitment that moves the issue into their own set of priority causes. Once this occurs, the issue truly becomes a touchpoint for long-term decision-making that influences individual behaviors such as voting, purchasing, and advocacy. Creating a personal conviction is very different from committing to take a specific action on a specific day.

While public will organizers will want and need individuals and organizations to take specific actions, it is cementing a personal conviction to the issue as represented through one's core values that creates resiliency and ongoing commitment that impacts multiple choices in the long term. Integrating grassroots and traditional media communication helps build conviction and is supported and augmented by the use of overt tools for commitment. The tools will vary based upon the issue being addressed and the cultural context of the community. A couple of examples follow:

Pledges—written commitments to championing a cause with both general statements of support and specific actions.

This tool is most powerful when it is both retained by the person or organization that makes the pledge (to serve as a reminder and as a plan of action) and is also shared with others either through a peer swap approach or through centralized collection of commitments. Peer swaps are a method of creating reinforcement and accountability on projects where the organizational capacity for staff follow-up does not exist. In this approach, each individual or organization that makes a pledge keeps a copy and swaps a copy with a peer. Each party agrees to check in with the peer at set intervals (three months, six months, a year) to provide support, encouragement and reminders. To create momentum and identify results, it is often helpful to seek permission to publish a list of those who make pledges. In a centralized collection model the public will sponsor or a partner organization receive all of the pledges and ensure that follow-up occurs at set intervals by volunteers or staff.

Declarations—signing a statement of commitment or formally endorsing a cause or an initiative.

Declarations are generally less specific than pledges and serve to establish a growing base of support, create agreement on general principles and drive accountability for leaders, policy-makers and organizations. To leverage impact of the declaration, signers and endorsers should retain or receive a copy. Where culturally appropriate, copies of declarations provided to signers should be in a format that encourages posting or other forms of distribution and acknowledgment. Organizers should request permission, then publish and update the list of signers to create momentum and increase credibility.

7. Continual Evaluation and Evolution—Public Will Building Phase 5

Ensuring that resources are deployed as effectively as possible and that results are being achieved require public will organizers to include ongoing evaluation and evolution. At each stage in the process, understanding how success will be measured, analyzing the impacts of each strategy, listening to and observing grassroots partners' use and modification of tools, and making appropriate adjustments will increase the public will campaign's impact. At the beginning of the process, public will organizers should identify key measures of success and establish clear baseline measures. Measurements can include:

- *Activities*: pledges and endorsements, reform proposals introduced, establishment of organizations and networks, etc.
- *Outcomes*: policy change, number of affordable housing units, percentage of low-birth weight babies, water or air quality, home ownership rates, job growth, per capita income changes, carbon sequestration, etc.
- *Comparative indicators*: comparative statistics on outcomes with peer communities, attitudinal indicators: measurable changes in attitudes and opinions.

Beyond measuring results and impacts, it is important to establish a protocol for continual evolution of strategy, messages, organizational structure and leadership. Results should be tracked as audience segments move through phases of *public will building*.

It is of particular importance to look at how grassroots partners adapt or modify strategies, messages and tools. In many social marketing efforts organizers only track adoption of tactics by the grassroots (who and how many have signed up to participate) and do not track how the grassroots innovates and modifies tools. By engaging grassroots participants in the evaluation and feedback process and by observing how strategies change when put to use in the field, public will organizers can hone their strategies and messages to be more effective. This approach also allows for easier recruitment of ambassadors and champions through use of language and tools that better resonate in the community. Finally, the evaluation/evolution protocol serves to reinforce the commitment of existing champions who experience true ownership by seeing their ideas adopted.

8. Sustainability through Reinforcement—All Phases of Public Will Building

Public will-based change must be resilient to establish, maintain and grow new sets of normative community expectations. To a great degree, this is accomplished through the very approach taken to create the change. As outlined above, this approach includes clear identification and framing of an issue in relationship to existing values, real engagement and ownership of key actors, momentum building through integrated media and grassroots outreach, and evolution of strategies in real time to improve impact and address new challenges and opportunities.

The sustainability of this work is significantly increased through overt recognition that the effort does not end with the call to action or the commitment of audiences to take action. In *public will building*, specific strategies are established to reinforce the choices and commitments made by ambassadors and champions. The reinforcement also provides confirmation to these advocates that their work is making a difference and creating real change. Public will organizers accomplish reinforcement by putting in place communication mechanisms to acknowledge, thank and update individuals and organizations that have made a commitment and taken action. These mechanisms include direct outreach and updates in the format that is most comfortable for the audience (including letters, e-mail, Web-based updates, personal meetings, phone calls, text messages, etc.) and through the message design of media and communication tools. Use of community building tactics such as celebrations, gatherings, demonstrations, networks, online communities, summits, conferences, events and peer swap relationships help empower champions and ambassadors to provide confirmation to each other.

About the Authors: Metropolitan Group

Metropolitan Group is a social change agency that crafts and integrates creative and strategic services that empower public purpose organizations to build a just and sustainable world. We work on behalf of nonprofit organizations, public agencies and socially responsible businesses to build public will; achieve changes in perception, behavior and program usage; and raise resources. Based in Portland, Oregon, with an office in Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Group is nationally recognized for designing and implementing campaigns that marry strategic communication, grassroots outreach, public relations, coalition building and resource development strategies.



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Eric is widely recognized as one of the nation's most effective experts in developing and implementing community-sector communication and resource development campaigns. He specializes in creating major *public will building* campaigns that build lasting social change and has led the company in raising more than \$1 billion in support of client projects. Eric is co-author of *Marketing That Matters*, a book on marketing practices that benefit social purpose organizations and change the world. He is also co-author of "Increasing Relevance, Relationships and Results: Principles & Practices for Effective Multicultural Communication," an article released by MG in 2008.



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Laura is a nationally recognized leader in the communication field and is respected for her skill in developing branding and communication strategies, social marketing and public will building campaigns, multicultural communication and grassroots support programs and trainings. She is sought after nationally for her deep expertise in the use of community engagement to mobilize stakeholders in support of community-based solutions to social issues and challenges (literacy, social justice, health, political, environmental, child welfare, education, etc.). She leads the firm's strategic communication practice and is co-author of "Increasing Relevance, Relationships and Results: Principles & Practices for Effective Multicultural Communication," as well as book chapters on social movements and advocacy. She is a member of the adjunct faculty at the Hatfield School of Government's Institute of Non profit Management in the College of Urban and Public Affairs at Portland State University.



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Jennifer has 10 years of experience helping organizations discover, distill and achieve their vision. She blends communication expertise with a unique understanding of the special needs of nonprofits and public agencies to build capacity and develop effective strategies that create results. She is the leader of MG’s organizational development practice area, bringing to this work a deep understanding of how to capture and focus the energy of individuals and groups to help them achieve their goals. She is also a co-author of Metropolitan Group’s “Increasing Relevance, Relationships and Results: Principles & Practices for Effective Multicultural Communication.”



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Jeannette has more than 26 years of experience in public policy, organizational development, public affairs, community relations, public involvement and program planning. Nationally known as an expert on issues related to increasing ethnic and racial diversity in communities, much of her work has focused on creating collaborative approaches to compelling social issues such as bias crimes, violence prevention and child welfare. Jeannette holds a master’s degree in education administration.

Additional Resources for You from Metropolitan Group

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PRINCIPLE 2: Understand the Cultural Context(s) of Your Audience: *Do your homework*

PRINCIPLE 3: Invest Before You Request: *Create "community-centered" partnerships*

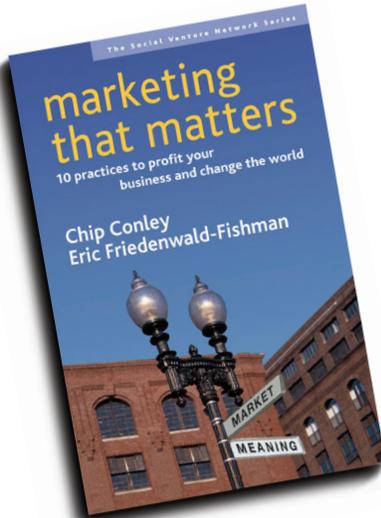
PRINCIPLE 4: Develop Authentic Relationships: *Maintain a long-term perspective*

PRINCIPLE 5: Build Shared Ownership: *Engage, don't just involve*

PRINCIPLE 6: Walk Your Talk: *Lead by example*

PRINCIPLE 7: Relate, Don't Translate: *Place communication into cultural context*

PRINCIPLE 8: Anticipate Change: *Be prepared to succeed*



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