



# PUBLIC WILL BUILDING

**A 3-4-5  
approach to  
sustainable  
change**



Metropolitan Group  
the power of voice

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# INTRODUCTION

Fifty years of campaigns across the United States to reduce the rates of smoking, combined with litigation against tobacco companies, generated little change in public perception or behavior. Now, smoke-free public spaces are the norm, the tobacco industry pays billions for public health programs and the rate of tobacco use among adults is less than half what it was 50 years ago.

What changed? **PUBLIC WILL.**

For decades, advocates for marriage equality were opposed by those who argued that it would bestow special rights on lesbian and gay couples and undermine the “traditional” concept of marriage. In 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld a ruling to provide marriage equality, and the notion that “love is love” is an increasingly recognized social norm.

What changed? **PUBLIC WILL.**

Thirty-five years ago, organic agricultural products were found exclusively in natural food stores. Today, organic food represents not just a \$43 billion industry but a normative expectation in conventional grocery stores, with the organic sections in national chain stores often larger than virtually any co-op or natural food store.

What changed? **PUBLIC WILL.**

# WHAT IS PUBLIC WILL BUILDING?

**PUBLIC WILL BUILDING** is a powerful strategy for social change grounded in communication theory and practice going back almost 2,400 years. It recognizes the incredible power that people possess to manifest change. And it is capable of motivating new behaviors, creating or leveraging social norms, and changing systems and policies to advance the cause of social justice, address disparity and promote a more inclusive society for all.

As a communication strategy, *public will building* is decidedly different than other social change efforts, which too often focus on short-term wins. Such efforts typically concentrate on shifting public opinion to obtain just enough support to “move the needle” in one direction or the other in response to an immediate challenge (e.g., defeating a ballot initiative or motivating individual actions, such as exercise, adjustments in diet, volunteering or recycling).

Public opinion-based campaigns can, in fact, be very effective if they generate significant social media chatter and traditional media exposure in a short period. In the past, the audiences for these campaigns often played a passive role as recipients of messages via traditional media coverage. Today, with the proliferation of social media channels, audiences for such campaigns can be more active. Still, audiences for public opinion-based efforts are most often employed to advance the echo chamber





that narrows the discourse, promotes entrenchment on one side of the issue or the other, and discourages true dialogue. These campaigns require constant (and costly) reinforcement. The resulting shifts in opinion and actions are typically short lived, resulting in no new community norms or expectations about the issue. Additionally, they are vulnerable to counter-campaigns that use the same approach to saturate audiences with a contrary message.

*Public will building* strategies are different. They focus on engaging people—based on their closely held personal values. The end goal is change that is sustainable because it is owned by the very people who demanded it. This is why we refer to such people as “stakeholders” in building public will rather than as “audiences.” The word “audiences” suggests a passive experience on the part of people who serve primarily as tools of a top-down effort, while “stakeholders” reflects people’s vested interest and high personal stakes in the outcome of a *public will building* effort.

Respecting stakeholders in this way means that *public will building* is not a spectator sport. This is great news for organizations and movements of all shapes and sizes that today have unprecedented ability to actively engage and mobilize stakeholders in ways they could not have dreamed of 20 years ago. *Public will building* uses the full range of engagement channels, from grassroots outreach to mass, social and direct media tools. The combination of connecting through values and using multiple media leads

to deeper public understanding and ownership of social change. By creating lasting shifts in community expectations that shape the way people think and act—and in what they demand of the systems and policies that affect their lives and communities—new social norms are realized.

The *public will building* model we offer here developed organically through practical experience in social change campaigns conducted over decades by Metropolitan Group. Since our founding in 1989, we have been engaged on behalf of movements, nonprofits, governments and foundations to develop and implement campaigns to create lasting changes in individual behavior, social norms, policies and systems. Through our work we have developed and evolved a 3-4-5 framework for *public will building*—comprised of three gears, four underlying principles and five elements—that has proven effective in establishing platforms for sustainable social change.

# 3 GEARS OF PUBLIC WILL BUILDING

**PUBLIC WILL** exists when three gears of change have been successfully put in motion: **behavioral**, **social** and **systemic**. The **behavioral** gear includes changes in the personal actions and behaviors of individuals or communities (e.g., being screened for a chronic disease, purchasing a clean-energy alternative, reading to your child, etc.). **Social** gears involve changes in social norms and expectations, while **systemic** gears include changes in policies, practices, and funding streams in communities, institutions, corporations, and government.

The recognition of the interdependence of these three gears is another difference between *public will building* and social marketing or public opinion-based campaigns focused on one-time individual actions. Although the latter efforts can be necessary and successful in the short run, they are unlikely to translate into sustainable change without eventually addressing the need for movement of the other two gears (**social** and **systemic**). Individuals are unlikely to sustain a new behavior, for example, if it is not eventually reinforced by a social norm and/or enabled or supported by the systems and policies that influence or even govern our lives. For this reason, even when organizers are employing a more traditional social marketing model, it can be useful to anticipate the need to motivate and enable movement of the **social** and **systemic** gears or to leverage existing social norms or systems and policies to facilitate behavior change. For example, the



systems and policy provisions that provide for screening for chronic disease as part of a recognized standard of care were leveraged as part of our campaign to promote screening for colorectal cancer on behalf of the Oregon Health Authority.

Despite their interdependence, success in moving one change gear does not automatically lead to success in moving another. The policy changes implemented in the 1960s that defined the civil rights movement were important and necessary changes driven primarily by individual and organized social activism. But while the appearance of a new social norm was created as a result, it clearly did not take root to the extent that supporters of the movement had hoped, and the era's policy advancements did not translate into broader systems change. Systemic racism in the United States continued, and the strongly defensive reaction against efforts to unmask it in recent years has served as a powerful reminder that success in moving one gear is not proof of—or an automatic precursor to—success in moving the others.

Movement of any of these three change gears can serve as the first goal of a comprehensive *public will building* effort, using one gear's momentum as the powertrain to set the others in motion. Systemic change relating to the use of seat belts (including laws requiring them) motivated behavioral change that eventually translated into a new social norm. Conversely, the fact that LGBTQI individuals

were being married by their communities of faith contributed to the growing social norm that ultimately manifested itself in systems and policy change in the form of legally recognized marriage equality.

It is important to note that systemic change does not always equate with public policy. In fact, changes in public policy or laws influencing our individual behaviors are not always necessary in building public will as long as other **systemic** gears (e.g., informal policy and business or other common practices) are being activated. The designated driver movement, for example, took hold and became a recognized social norm supported by systemic change in the form of free nonalcoholic beverages provided to such drivers by bars and restaurants. Similarly, the values-based social norm relating to recycling that exists in many communities across the country has been reinforced by (and helped to drive the implementation of) systemic changes that make recycling easier (e.g., the distribution of recycling containers by municipalities) or changes in associated costs to engage in the new behavior (e.g., free recycling pickup and/or charges for garbage bound for the landfill).

However, policy change might be a necessary element of systems change to incentivize behaviors that are resistant even to social norm pressure. Laws making it illegal to use a cell phone while driving reflect such a strategy.

# 4 PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC WILL BUILDING

*For decades, smoking prevention advocates struggled against the tobacco industry, which had effectively framed the issue around the core value of individual freedom in order to drive policy in its favor. Even the introduction of data showing the harmful effects of secondhand smoke was ineffective in changing this dynamic. Smoking prevention advocates, however, were able to co-opt the value of individual freedom, redefining it from “I have the right to do as I please with my own body” to “I have the right to be protected from harm resulting from someone else’s smoking.” This successful reframe—leveraging an existing core value—helped turn the tide in motivating **behavioral**, **social** and **systemic** change.*





Our *public will building* approach is grounded in four underlying principles, which together form the foundation for successful social change efforts using this model. While each principle is independently present in other forms of social marketing and communication, the synergy and strength of the combined principles used in concert with one another make *public will building* distinctive.

## 1. Connecting through closely held values

Values trump data when it comes to decision-making. As Harvard University brain expert Jill Bolte Taylor wrote, “Although many of us may think of ourselves as thinking creatures that feel, biologically we are feeling creatures that think.”<sup>1</sup> People make decisions consciously and unconsciously based on their values, and then use data to reinforce their worldview and rationalize their choices. People can and do make isolated decisions based on specific needs or situations. But for individuals to maintain a lasting commitment to an issue as a personal priority—and to speak out or hold a conviction that leads to action—the issue must resonate with their closely held values and reflect their assumptions about how the world works.

As with other forms of persuasive communication, connecting through closely held values is best achieved via narrative and stories that carry the message; the choice of language, metaphor and imagery; and the selection of messengers who share values with the audience.

## 2. Understanding and respecting cultural context

Effective engagement with stakeholders around closely held values requires that organizers work with individuals and communities to understand what shaped the values they hold: their lived experience, history with the issue, cultural heritage and even exposure to trauma. In addition to informing the identification of values, this engagement helps public will organizers understand the dynamics of power, language, relationships, traditions, historical context, worldview and decision-making in a given cultural context. This understanding informs organizers’ selection of relevant and effective leadership, messengers, messages, strategies, tactics and tools.

<sup>1</sup> Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist’s Personal Journey* (New York: Viking, 2008).

## 3. Generating stakeholder ownership

Building public will depends on the creation of legitimate engagement and ownership in the opportunity by the people most affected. This ownership can only come from authentic and meaningful engagement in all aspects of the *public will building* effort, from the research that informs it, to the strategies, messaging, and creative elements of the initiative, to the evaluation and learnings taken from it.

## 4. Integrating grassroots/grasstops engagement and communication strategies

Connecting to values is most effectively accomplished through relationships of trust. It relies on peers, friends, neighbors, family members, co-workers and other community members (grassroots) who connect with one another to share information and motivate one another to action. It also derives significant leverage from engaging through trusted leaders, organizations, networks and institutions rooted in the community (grasstops).

Typical public opinion-based campaigns invest the lion’s share of resources in mass and targeted media to ensure high exposure to messaging, while they generally invest fewer resources in grassroots outreach to support dissemination, activation and trial. A *public will building* effort flips this equation on its head by focusing comprehensively on grassroots/grasstops engagement, working closely with organizations and individuals who are trusted by stakeholders and who provide an outlet for action that is familiar and trusted. *Public will building* then uses mass media in many different forms (earned media, advertising, promoted social media, etc.) to provide context for—and to reinforce—the engagement and dialogue happening at the individual and community level. This integrated approach is a major factor distinguishing *public will building* from traditional public awareness or opinion-focused work.

# 5 ELEMENTS OF PUBLIC WILL BUILDING

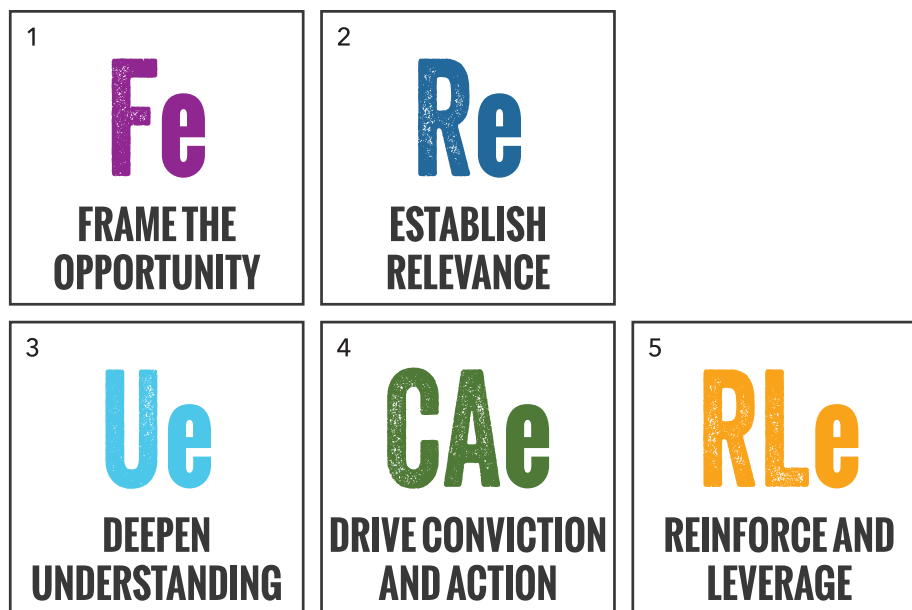
*Shaping public will requires a multi-dimensional approach to changing attitudes and influencing behavior. The five elements we have identified refer to both the steps that organizers must go through to create public will and the experiences stakeholders must have to make the sustainable change that provides evidence of the manifestation of public will.*



While our experience shows that the progression from one to another is critically important, the five elements are not necessarily separate from one another. Instead, they are closely related, reinforce one another, and sometimes occur simultaneously or overlap with one another.

It is also common for one stakeholder group to be moving on to subsequent elements of *public will building* while another stakeholder segment is just getting started, creating a cyclical movement that builds on itself over time.

The five elements of *public will building* are shown below:<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Readers of our original article on *public will building* (first published in 2005) will notice that the labels we use here for the elements of *public will building* have evolved. The objective and substance of what is happening relative to each element

remains the same, but we have sharpened the labels to make them more clear. Also, please note that we have replaced "phase" with "element" to avoid the suggestion of separate and linear periods of time.

## ELEMENT 1

## Fe

## FRAME THE OPPORTUNITY

In *public will building*, stakeholders help frame the opportunity—informing understanding of the issue and providing insights and input to shape the *public will building* effort. The framing process includes identification of the core values that connect stakeholders to the issue and the ways in which narrative and messaging can be used effectively to engage stakeholders constructively.

Engaging stakeholders throughout *public will building* is essential, and it must be done authentically. For guidance on how to accomplish this—particularly with regard to multicultural communities and those experiencing disparity—we invite you to read our article on [effective multicultural engagement](https://metgroup.com/assets/MCC.pdf) ([metgroup.com/assets/MCC.pdf](https://metgroup.com/assets/MCC.pdf)). Engaging stakeholders in this way encourages a sense of ownership and investment in the *public will building* effort, which increases their likelihood of taking action and serving as champions and influencers to others.

As part of framing the opportunity with stakeholders, public will organizers define both the problem and its solution. In defining the problem, organizers must consider and understand

- its root causes (e.g., systemic racism) and cultural context
- the impact of the problem (e.g., social, economic, environmental, etc.)
- the barriers standing in the way of its resolution

In framing the opportunity, it is essential that public will organizers avoid developing messaging that preaches to the choir while failing to engage other potential stakeholders. A common pitfall is to assume that the core values that motivate “the faithful” will also resonate with other stakeholders. For years, the arts and culture sector fell into this trap, assuming that valuing the arts for their

own intrinsic value and the enrichment they provide in our lives was a relevant values association on which to build a broader and more diverse movement. Our research conducted with Arts Midwest as part of the *Creating Connection* movement to build public will for the arts, culture and creative expression as a recognized, valued and expected part of everyday life found that the core value of *connection* is what brings more diverse stakeholders to seek out opportunities to express or experience creativity in their lives.

In addition to taking great care to identify the relevant values driver, it is critical to develop narratives and messaging that promote cognitive processing in a way that motivates action. There are plenty of examples of well-intentioned public will initiatives that have fallen into a trap by employing narratives and messaging that proved counterproductive. The “greenhouse effect” messaging early in the climate change movement, for example, failed to produce the desired level of urgency in part because it used a metaphor many people find to be pleasant and positive. Advocates working to “prevent childhood obesity” have similarly found themselves fighting an uphill battle against an individual responsibility value that assigns blame for childhood obesity to parents or to the children themselves and invites defensiveness on the part of parents and caregivers. Messaging we developed for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation centered around making sure that “all children grow up at a healthy weight” lowers defensive barriers and broadens the conversation to include systemic and policy change opportunities.



# Fe FRAME THE OPPORTUNITY

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## Public will organizers are:

*Mapping, researching, segmenting and prioritizing stakeholders.*

*Identifying the underlying core values associated with the issue or opportunity.*

*Identifying potential change agents and pathways.*

*Framing the opportunity's narrative.*

*Developing the public will building plan.*

## Stakeholders are:

*Informing the framing of the issue or opportunity and the public will building plan.*

*Gaining a sense of ownership and investment in the effort and its narrative.*

## ELEMENT 2

# Re

## ESTABLISH RELEVANCE

In a vast and increasingly cluttered marketplace of ideas and information, it is critical that public will organizers find a way to connect with stakeholders to (first) gain their attention and (second) establish the relevance of the opportunity before them. It is important to note that relevance cannot be manufactured; it must be earned. Effective framing of the opportunity (including identification of core values, cultural context, etc.) is essential to earning the recognition of relevance from stakeholders.

Authenticity is the key to establishing relevance. And it can only be assured by continuing to engage stakeholders in a meaningful way, including gaining their insight and input on the initiative's goals and objectives, strategy, messaging and more. This can be achieved through multiple means, including engagement of advisory panels (both in-person and online), social media listening, focus and informal discussion groups, surveys, and so on. This input helps organizers prioritize stakeholders, select the best channels (and messengers) for delivering information and calls to action, identify potential champions and allies, and more.

In addressing Element 2, public will organizers are creating (and capitalizing on) opportunities to engage stakeholders with the desired frame through grassroots outreach and media. Grassroots outreach delivers direct communication through trusted community-based organizations and influencers who are often most effective in connecting the opportunity to existing values, delivering messages that feel true and relevant, and fostering a true sense of ownership. Media (traditional, digital, promoted social, etc.) are used to build currency for the frame and core ideas behind the initiative, reinforce and provide a more fertile environment for the direct outreach happening on the ground, and demonstrate to early adopters that they are part of a larger movement.

For their part, stakeholders are considering the relevance of the opportunity to themselves and their community. They are connecting through the opportunity frame to their closely held values, increasing the attention they pay to—and the priority they place on—the issue(s) being addressed by the public will effort. If effectively earned, relevance provides the foundation not just for buy-in but also for ownership of the issue or opportunity for which public will is sought.

Communication might include an awareness campaign to introduce the opportunity in such a way as to spark attention and encourage conversation while not yet providing detailed information or delivering calls to action. Since the elements of *public will building* can overlap one another, however, it is also possible that delivery of information necessary to deepen understanding (see Element 3 below) might occur almost simultaneously with the establishment of relevance as defined here in Element 2.

The relative timing of the implementation of these elements (and the transition between them) is best determined case by case. For example, efforts to engage stakeholders considered to be low-hanging fruit (i.e., stakeholders for whom relevance is already understood or easily earned, and those predisposed to action) might move very quickly from Element 1 to Element 2 and Element 3 or deliver them simultaneously. For stakeholders not already predisposed, a potentially lengthy process of establishing relevance (Element 2) might be essential before providing the information necessary to deepen their understanding (Element 3) in ways that promote receptivity to calls to action.

# Re ESTABLISH RELEVANCE

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## Public will organizers are:

*Crafting messages and stories to advance the narrative, and identifying communication channels.*

*Initiating outreach to stakeholders through grassroots engagement and media.*

*Disseminating messaging and stories to raise awareness.*

*Attracting early adopters and key influencers.*

## Stakeholders are:

*Informing development and refinement of strategy, messaging, creative, etc.*

*Becoming aware through trusted relationships, affiliations, media and so on.*

*Considering and recognizing relevance and connection to closely held values.*

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## ELEMENT 3

# Ue

## DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

Having established relevance, public will organizers transition to providing information about how change can occur. These change mechanisms can (and should) include the three solution mechanisms (gears) described on pages 6 – 7: **behavioral**, **social** and **systemic**.

Because relevance has been established, stakeholders should now be receptive to (or even seeking) ways in which they can have impact through all three solution tracks. They are becoming more focused on the solutions being presented and considering how their own actions might contribute in positive ways.

Now, organizers can build on the core values identified as the foundation of the initiative—and the newly achieved awareness and relevance—by providing the more detailed information that “makes the case” for why and how change can occur. Again, because the elements of *public will building* can overlap or even occur simultaneously depending on the receptivity of stakeholders, direct calls to action might or might not be delivered concurrently with the deepening of understanding. Whereas some stakeholders might be ready and eager to translate their understanding into action, others might need more time to develop a greater understanding of solutions before they become receptive to direct calls to action.

In *public will building*, we pay deep attention to how stakeholders (in particular, grassroots) adapt the frame and tools based upon what does and does not work in the field and with particular communities and stakeholder segments. The learning that comes from establishing listening posts and feedback loops—and from more formalized evaluation, if possible—can be applied to the frame or strategy and shared with early adopters and allies. This very act delivers a dual benefit: it improves the efficacy of the public will effort by harnessing learning from the field, and it reinforces the conviction and ownership of early adopters by validating and celebrating their innovations.

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# Ue DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

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## Public will organizers are:

*Transmitting messaging about the desired change and the solutions and mechanisms for change.*

## Stakeholders are:

*Hearing about the opportunity through multiple trusted channels.*

*Processing messaging about the opportunity, including its associated challenges (and their root causes) and proposed solutions and mechanisms for change.*

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## ELEMENT 4

## CAe

## DRIVE CONVICTION AND ACTION

Element 4 represents the critical stage at which individuals make a choice (consciously or subconsciously) either to “own” and have an impact on an issue or to be merely aware of it. This commitment to creating change goes beyond a one-time behavior change. Conviction means that people understand the opportunity and dedicate themselves to helping advance it through a variety of actions. The issue becomes a touchpoint in individual choice-making, influencing how people act, what they purchase, how they vote, and to what causes they lend or deny their support.

Capitalizing on the established relevance and deepened understanding established earlier, public will organizers provide clear and specific calls to action that encourage behaviors in at least one solution category (**behavioral**, **social** and **systemic**).

These calls to action should be framed with an awareness of the overall context so that individual commitments and changes are seen as a reflection of personal conviction and of new and aspirational community expectations. They should primarily drive choices and behaviors that create (or reinforce) greater commitment to the issue, including encouragement to become a champion or advocate to their peers and social networks.

Using the integrated grassroots and media approach essential to *public will building*, the calls to action should be delivered directly by champions and allies already known to (and trusted by) stakeholders, and supported by messaging delivered through media and other communication channels.

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# CAe DRIVE CONVICTION AND ACTION

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## Public will organizers are:

*Continuing to transmit messaging through multiple channels.*

*Articulating tangible calls to action.*

*Inviting ongoing conviction, action and championship.*

## Stakeholders are:

*Gaining a sense of ownership and dedication to advancing the opportunity.*

*Considering specific calls to action.*

*Committing themselves to making a difference.*

*Taking action(s) and recruiting others to take action(s).*

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## ELEMENT 5

# RLe

## REINFORCE AND LEVERAGE

As we've described earlier, *public will building* is different from other social change strategies because it focuses on long-term, sustainable change that is manifested in multiple actions taken across all solution categories (**behavioral**, **social** and **systemic**). For such changes to be sustainable, *public will building* efforts reinforce initial actions taken by stakeholders both to encourage their repetition and to leverage those actions to motivate other actions and to influence others in their community.

Reinforcement supports repetition by helping to 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. The more they feel that their choices have been reinforced, the more they will take actions consistent with their conviction to drive change and influence others.

Leverage comes into play in the *public will building* approach in two respects. First, the approach recognizes that once stakeholders have adopted a new behavior, they are generally more receptive to consideration of another. For example, stakeholders who have exercised the option to increase consumption of healthier food in their own homes might be encouraged to advocate for access to those healthier options in their public schools and in communities for whom access to such products is scarce. Or stakeholders who have taken action by encouraging their elected officials to support a clean energy plan might be motivated to choose a clean energy provider for their home heating and electricity. This leveraging of one action to expand conviction and motivate other actions reflects the often cyclical nature the *public will building* approach.

Leverage also comes into play in recognizing that most public will efforts that succeed in creating large-scale and sustained change benefit from the decentralized and aligned efforts of numerous organizations, coalitions and communities all seeking to advance the same issue or opportunity. Ideally, such efforts should be aware of one another, and they generally benefit from being collaborative (if not synergized). But they might or might not be formally structured. Whereas structure might be essential for some *public will building* efforts, other efforts are more successful if they evolve in a more informal, organic way. For example, public will in support of watershed protection through the RiverSmart initiative was led by River Network working through 300 local watershed groups. Marriage equality, by contrast, was led by a nationwide network acting in a highly coordinated way, supplemented by concurrent and often overlapping work at the local, state and federal levels, and by the personal advocacy and investment of its supporters.

It is in this confluence of reinforcement and leverage to create **behavioral**, **social** and **systemic** change that public will has truly been achieved.

Evaluation allows for the iteration of strategy and messaging, and the development of new tools or resources, to build on what is working and to address what is not. For suggestions on how to measure the effectiveness of a *public will building* effort, please see page 25 in the appendix.



# RLe REINFORCE AND LEVERAGE

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## Public will organizers are:

*Evaluating the effectiveness of strategies, tactics, messaging and tools.*

*Adapting and iterating based on learning in the field, and sharing that learning.*

*Supporting/reinforcing stakeholders who have taken action.*

*Connecting with, encouraging, and collaborating with other individuals and organizations similarly focused on the opportunity.*

## Stakeholders are:

*Being exposed to messages/stories/actions from multiple sources and channels that validate the actions they have taken.*

*Repeating the initial action and considering (and taking) other actions consistent with advancing the opportunity.*

*Championing the opportunity and recruiting others.*

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# IN CONCLUSION

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**PUBLIC WILL BUILDING** is an exercise in hope and optimism.

It reflects the conviction that authentically connecting with people in ways that reflect what they care about most deeply can unlock understanding and action capable of changing their lives—and the world—for the better.

Our approach was born out of observation—and our experience—of what works and what doesn't in creating a more just and sustainable world. We and our clients—and advocates across the United States and internationally—have used this approach to advance a wide range of issues and opportunities, some of which have been described in these pages.

*Public will building* should not be looked at as an either/or proposition, but as a both/and.

Too often the focus on winning short-term battles (critical though they might be at the time) obscures the need for the long-term culture shift work involved in *public will building*. As a consequence, advocates often have difficulty translating the fruits of one successful labor into the seeds of another. Yet they feel torn between either the pursuit of much-needed short-term success or broader, and more comprehensive, long-term victory.

Change agents can apply a public will lens to accomplish immediate strategic objectives while also changing the environment and cultural expectations within which they are operating to increase the likelihood of achieving other strategic objectives in the future.

At its core, building public will is about connection, not division.

It connects people based on shared values to create a future that reflects what they care deeply about. It provides a greater assurance of longevity and sustainability for the change being sought. It does not appeal to fleeting impulse, fear or (even worse) base instincts. Instead it leverages a values connection to establish relevance—which is the keystone for understanding. Understanding breeds conviction, which in turn can become action. Action attracts the attention and consideration of others, who in turn are motivated to action themselves. And action in one context or setting inspires action in another. In this way, public will is achieved, ultimately establishing a new set of social norms and community expectations. This makes it more likely that changes will last, and that additional (and perhaps more difficult) challenges will be surmounted in the future.

And because it seeks to identify and leverage shared values held by often diverse stakeholders, *public will building* holds the power to bring people together and generate a more inclusive and just society, one opportunity at a time.

In a world wrestling every day with a complex set of issues and competing priorities, *public will building* is not just a strategic option for issue advocates ...

... *public will building* is a social justice imperative.

We hope you will use this model and share it with others.





# APPENDIX A

## Key Techniques in Public Will Building

The *public will building* model integrates a complex set of theories from communication, social marketing, media advocacy, community organizing and multicultural engagement. However, the greater depth and breadth of *public will building* requires the unique application of several fundamentals in the process.

### Stakeholder Mapping and Prioritization

Within each stakeholder group there is a spectrum of attitudes and levels of interest and awareness about a given issue. Understanding this spectrum of interest helps organizers 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 segments that are unlikely to change.

To understand how best to connect with stakeholder segments, research focuses on identifying each segment's

- opportunity to take action
- relevant core values that connect it to the issue (or predispose it against the issue)
- driving motivations and needs that might compel it to act
- barriers and obstacles it might face (and how those barriers and obstacles might be overcome)
- pathways through which we can reach and engage it (trusted messengers, conduits and channels)
- leverage in terms of who influences the segment and whom that segment, in turn, influences

Stakeholder identification begins by mapping where stakeholders are relative to one another in terms of their relationship to the issue and readiness for action (interest) and their potential to either directly create change or influence change in others (influence). Once segmentation

is accomplished, each stakeholder group is prioritized with respect to the goals and timeline for the effort. For the tools we use at Metropolitan Group to engage in stakeholder mapping, segmentation and prioritization, please visit [metgroup.com/assets/MG\\_StakeholderMapping.pdf](http://metgroup.com/assets/MG_StakeholderMapping.pdf).

Mapping in this way helps focus outreach and grassroots implementation. It can be completed both at the macro level (e.g., determining which individuals and organizations have significant influence with each major stakeholder segment) and at an individual level (e.g., determining the sphere of influence for each champion identified).

Generally, *public will building* campaigns focus on providing a fertile environment and easy-to-use communication tools so that stakeholders in the later stages (conviction/action and reinforcement) can reach and influence those who are still in the earlier process.

In mapping stakeholders and considering their level of influence, it is important to consider the degree to which they have credibility with—and the respect and trust of—other stakeholder groups. We call this validity of voice. Those with validity of voice can include respected individuals; formal and informal leaders (particularly important based on the cultural context); media and other preferred communication channels; trusted advisors; and members of business, civic, faith and advocacy organizations. Based on their placement on the stakeholder map relative to their influence, people (or organizations) can then be categorized as potential champions or ambassadors.

### Champions

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





## Ambassadors

Ambassadors are individuals or 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 relative to other stakeholder segments, organizations, communities and 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 influence a critical early stakeholder segment.

## Structuring a Public Will Building Effort

As noted in the main body of the paper, leveraging one action to propel others and drive adoption of a new social norm across the spectrum of **behavioral**, **social** and **systemic** change is a critical component of *public will building*. Thus, cultivating or capitalizing on the work of others to aggregate individual efforts into a broader movement is essential. Embracing a collaborative approach to leverage the work of change agents from the public sector, philanthropy and mission-driven companies can be instrumental in this process, whether we are seeking to build public will through a formal, organized structure or more informally and organically.

If structure is desired or needed, attention should be paid to the following considerations:

- How long does the effort need or expect 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 need and can reasonably obtain?
- Based on whom we need to influence, what structure will provide us with the most leverage?

Here are some of the more typical options for organizational structure:

- **Initiative** – A time-specific or limited-scope project for which individuals and organizations make a one-time commitment.
- **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 or cause (often for a defined period of time or through the achievement of specific changes). Each member has made a clear commitment to participate and generally represent the point of view and needs of its own constituency. Members carry the responsibility of communicating to, and activating, their constituencies.
- **Alliance** – A long-term coalition dedicated to an issue that will encompass many individual efforts and that is central to the mission of all members.
- **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.

## Measurement and Evaluation

As with any effort to change behaviors or social norms, ongoing evaluation (and evolution or iteration over time) ensures that resources are deployed as effectively as possible and that results are being achieved. 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. Evaluation can include action measures (*inputs* and *outputs*) and result measures (*outcomes* and *impact*):

- **Inputs** – What public will organizers "put in," including investments of time and energy, research, engagement with stakeholders, formation of advisory bodies, and so forth.



- **Outputs** – What public will organizers create, including campaign brands and message frames, digital and social media engagement tools and resources, earned and paid media activities, training and implementation tool kits, and so forth.
- **Outcomes** – What happens when the campaign is implemented in terms of changes in attitudes, understanding and behaviors.
- **Impact** – The difference the public will campaign makes in benefiting people, their communities and society at large.

In measuring actions and results, it is important to establish a protocol for continual evolution of strategy, messages, organizational structure and leadership.

It is of particular importance to look at how grassroots partners adapt or modify strategies, messages and tools. In many social marketing efforts, organizers track only 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 the 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.

For more information about measurement, please refer to our paper “**Measuring What Matters: The Challenge of Quantifying Social Change**” ([metgroup.com/assets/690\\_measuringwhatmattersscreepdf](http://metgroup.com/assets/690_measuringwhatmattersscreepdf)).



# APPENDIX B

## Case Study: Building Public Will for Libraries in the US

In the early 20th century, libraries were the center of many communities, and their imposing public facades reflected their stature and the respect they commanded. From 1900 through the 1970s, libraries in America experienced a boom, gaining significant support as well as public and private investment. By the 1990s, however, many central libraries in our urban centers were in decline, and many communities were left without branch libraries or with facilities facing reduced hours and diminishing budgets. Around the same time, the growth of the Internet led many to believe that libraries were becoming obsolete.

Due to the combined efforts of numerous library systems and library associations at the state and national level, libraries have experienced a renaissance, reflected in the renovation of historic central libraries or construction of new central libraries in virtually every major U.S. city, a boom in new branch construction, and major innovations and investments in technology and digital services. And, not coincidentally, there has been a huge increase in library use.

What changed? **PUBLIC WILL.**

For more than 20 years, Metropolitan Group has been engaged in a variety of *public will building* efforts on behalf of libraries across the country. Below are a few examples, described in the context of the five elements of *public will building*.

### ELEMENT 1

## Fe FRAME THE OPPORTUNITY

In our work with libraries across the country—and through significant engagement with library stakeholders—we have found a deeply held value that powerfully connects people to their public libraries: *opportunity*. The library plays a

central role in ensuring that opportunity exists for all people. By ensuring that knowledge and information are free and accessible to all, libraries foster the opportunity to learn, to explore and to connect.

Thanks to sustained efforts to employ this frame, by libraries and library systems across the country over the last 20 years, the opportunity frame has taken such hold that the American Library Association, in its 2015 State of America's Libraries report, referred to public libraries serving as "community anchors that address economic, education and health disparities in the community."<sup>1</sup> And a 2013 study by Pew Research Center found that "95% of Americans ages 16 and older agree that the materials and resources available at public libraries play an important role in giving everyone a chance to succeed."<sup>2</sup> The same study found that 94 percent of Americans say having a public library improves the quality of life in a community, and 81 percent say public libraries provide many services people would have a hard time finding elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

### ELEMENT 2

## Re ESTABLISH RELEVANCE

Washington's King County Library System (KCLS) successfully established relevance among key stakeholders when it sought to educate patrons and voters about capital needs for the growing regional library system. A

1 "Public Libraries," American Libraries: The Magazine of the American Library Association, April 2015 (Special Issue: The State of America's Libraries): 10, [http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/0415\\_StateAmLib\\_0.pdf](http://www.ala.org/news/sites/ala.org.news/files/content/0415_StateAmLib_0.pdf).

2 Kathryn Zickuhr et al., "How Americans Value Public Libraries in Their Communities," Pew Research Center, December 11, 2013, <http://libraries.pewinternet.org/2013/12/11/libraries-in-communities/>.

3 Ibid.





community survey was conducted to gauge those aspects of the system that were most important to the community, and a series of listening sessions were held throughout the service area to hear directly from customers what they most valued and wanted from KCLS.

KCLS then created a message framework that reflected back to the community what the library had learned about the community's desire for quality facilities and technology, and expanded or new facilities, all in support of the community's underlying core values of opportunity and lifelong learning. The education effort created opportunities for sharing information at meetings of community organizations and through material provided on the website and via direct mail, and for placing specific, detailed information in each branch about improvements and changes that would result from the funding. Through these efforts, the library was able to effectively convey its commitment to meeting community needs and expectations.

A separate, privately funded bond advocacy campaign formed by community members then built upon the baseline of community knowledge to promote the specific action needed to ensure capital funding for the library system—passage of the bond. The bond advocacy campaign asked the community to take action in support of the library system by voting “yes” on the ballot measure authorizing the capital bond. The community did so with more than 63 percent of the vote.

### ELEMENT 3

## Ue

### DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING

A decade ago, the Louisville Free Public Library (LFPL) was wrestling with the critical need to expand facilities and services in a community that had not made any major investments in libraries in nearly a century. To address this challenge, the library engaged community members throughout Jefferson County to explore what mattered most to residents. What surfaced? Opportunity for education and lifelong learning delivered by the library.

The library—in collaboration with the LFPL Foundation—mounted a *public will building* campaign that deepened community members' understanding of the ways in which

the library supports community priorities and highlighted the benefit of investment in libraries. The campaign elevated and mobilized library champions, including youth and community leaders, in support of this vital role of the library and the necessity for financial investment to ensure the library's ability to meet current and future community needs. The result was a groundswell of support for the library that led to an initial investment of \$2.5 million in new facilities appropriated by the city-county government, including \$1 million to build the first new library branch in more than 10 years in a neighborhood that had been historically underserved.

Since that time, and with the strong support of the community, LFPL has continued to explore a diversity of pathways to securing investment—from library district to county to state funding opportunities—to expand facilities and services. The community has continued its robust investment with the addition of three new regional libraries and well over \$50 million in leveraged capital investment. LFPL was recognized with the national LibraryAware award for its role as a leader in improving the overall literacy of the community (both children and adults) and supporting lifelong learning for residents.

### ELEMENT 4

## CAe

### DRIVE CONVICTION AND ACTION

As part of its successful *public will building* efforts over two decades, Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon, first framed its messaging through the opportunity lens of the library as a critical educational and cultural resource. Then it raised awareness of the library's importance by communicating to residents that a great library is key to a great community. The library then transmitted the information that action was required—in the form of considerable investment in capital infrastructure.

As a result, a significant percentage of voters acted on their personal conviction that their community needed to financially support a great library. This shift in public will ensured the passage of a bond measure to renovate the central library and to build new facilities or renovate all the branches. It also resulted in \$4.5 million in private capital, including \$1 million raised in approximately 90 days through a mass appeal campaign. This was the first



significant private philanthropy for the library in decades, and philanthropic support continues to grow to this day. In subsequent years, voters passed an expanded operating levy to support extended hours and increased collections.

## ELEMENT 5

# RLe

## REINFORCE AND LEVERAGE

Having secured funding to conduct a multiyear statewide marketing effort for libraries of all types, the Washington State Library's marketing committee was established to represent the needs and interests of a diverse array of libraries and demographics throughout the state. Washington State Library launched a broad-based effort that included a media campaign, materials development and distribution, and extensive training for libraries on effective marketing strategies. It conducted special outreach to school and academic libraries to address their unique needs. Presentations—to library staff, leadership groups, and trustees, and at conferences—ensured the broadest reach, flexibility and support.

Washington State Library used significant data collected in the first year to adapt the campaign for subsequent years. For example, evaluation revealed a need to refine communication tools so they better elevated the stakeholders that local library systems serve more directly. As a result, new materials were developed to allow placement of text and branding elements from individual library systems. Also, based upon what was learned in evaluation, communication tools were refined to adopt a first-person voice in which library users told their stories themselves, increasing the relevance and authenticity of the messaging. In addition, to reinforce the commitment of early adopters, the library system extended advanced training and support for individual marketing efforts to libraries that had taken action.

## Sustainable Change for Libraries

*Public will building* is a powerful approach to creating sustainable change in perceptions and understanding, ensuring that libraries are viewed as critical to vibrant, healthy communities and provide opportunity for all.

Thanks to the efforts described above—and many others across the country—far from experiencing a decline in the face of a growing Internet, libraries have flourished.

A 2016 Pew Research Center study found that nearly half of Americans had used a public library or bookmobile in the previous year, and that millennials were more likely to have visited a public library than adults in any other generation.<sup>4</sup> Further, the Institute of Museum and Library Services reported in that in 2015 libraries had offered 4.7 million programs, which were attended by 106 million people, reflecting an increase of four million over the previous year.<sup>5</sup> And the American Library Association notes that last year more people went into a library than attended all professional and college sporting events combined.

*Metropolitan Group is honored to have worked on public will building, message framing, advocacy and stakeholder engagement initiatives with numerous libraries and library associations that have been leaders in building public will to support libraries. Through these libraries' and associations' individual campaigns and ongoing communication efforts, and the sharing of their learnings with the field, they have transformed the normative expectations in the U.S., allowing communities to see libraries as a critical resource and gateway to opportunity. We have been inspired through our work with visionaries such as the American Library Association, the Public Library Association, Washington State Library, DC Public Library, the King County Library System, the Louisville Free Public Library, Multnomah County Library, Brooklyn Public Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, Sacramento Public Library, San Jose Public Library, West Hollywood Library, the State Library of North Carolina and many others.*

4 Abigail Geiger, "Millennials Are the Most Likely Generation of Americans to Use Public Libraries," Pew Research Center, June 21, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/21/millennials-are-the-most-likely-generation-of-americans-to-use-public-libraries/>.

5 "Public Libraries Survey (PLS) Data and Reports," Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2015, <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey/explore-pls-data/pls-data>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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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.



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**Kevin** has nearly 30 years of experience in applying strategic communication to create sustainable change in understanding, behavior, social norms and policy. The lead of MG's strategic communication practice, Kevin is a national leader in framing issues and driving narrative to promote positive social change. He is the principal author of MG's "Measuring What Matters: The Challenge of Quantifying Social Change" and "Values. Value. Voice. The 3Vs of Social Purpose Branding."

## ABOUT METROPOLITAN GROUP

Metropolitan Group crafts strategic and creative services to amplify the power of voice of change agents in building a just and sustainable world. We work on behalf of nonprofit organizations, public agencies, foundations and socially responsible businesses to promote public health and health equity, environmental sustainability, social justice and human rights, literacy and learning, creative expression, and more.

Based in Portland, Oregon—with offices in Washington, D.C.; Chicago; and San Francisco, and a sister company in Mexico City—Metropolitan Group is recognized internationally as the pioneer of *public will building*, and for designing and implementing campaigns that marry strategic communication, grassroots outreach, coalition building, organizational development and resource development strategies.

For more information and other articles, please visit [metgroup.com](http://metgroup.com).

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Metropolitan Group also acknowledges the contributions of three former colleagues in the development or refinement of our approach to *public will building*:

**Laura K. Lee Dellinger** Formerly the president of MG, Laura is a principal with WiseBridge

**Jennifer Gilstrap Hearn** Formerly a vice president at MG, Jennifer currently works as an independent consultant.

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Photo, facing page: © Molly Adams  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/mollyswork/36982382036>





*“In a world wrestling every day with a complex set of issues and competing priorities, **public will building** is not just a strategic option for issue advocates ...*

*... **public will building** is a social justice imperative.”*

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Mexico City  
Portland  
San Francisco  
Washington, D.C.

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