

Debriefing Campaigns

After the campaign

Every campaign is a learning opportunity. With each campaign we should get smarter and better as an organisation. The risk is that at the end of a campaign everyone is so tired/exhilarated they can overlook making the time to really learn the lessons.

There are a range of needs to be addressed at the end of a campaign:

- The need to manage information and resources – doing final data entries, analysing data, writing reports, gathering materials etc
- The need to recover from the big outlay of energy and emotion involved in election campaigning – ‘coming down’ from adrenalin, resting, getting on an even keel
- The need to express feelings and opinions about the campaign – to get ‘closure’
- The need to appreciate each other and attend to relationships that may have been strained
- The need to evaluate, to give feedback and learn from the experience so we improve on it next time

Some different ways to meet those needs:

- Have a checklist of what information is needed by who by when, and ensure these timelines are known by people
- Have parties/celebrations/social time to be together and unwind
- Hold debriefs where people can process what has happened, give feedback, and be together as a group
- Undertake other evaluation and debrief activities like surveys, one-to-one meetings, performance reviews and exit interviews

Some tips for designing and facilitating debriefs

- If possible get an external facilitator to run the debrief. This could be a supporter who had some involvement in the campaign but was not central and doesn't have strong opinions (or can put them to one side during the session).
- If someone central to the campaign needs to run the debrief see about a cofacilitation set-up. This allows people to step out of the facilitation role to participate if needed, and shares the load.
- Be clear about the purpose and what can be achieved in the time available.
- Open with a clear intention. Welcome people. Remind people that the urgency of the campaign is over.
- Have guidelines for the gathering. Some things I find useful to say to the group:
 - Be thoughtful about how you phrase evaluation of the campaign. People have worked very hard and are still recovering. Avoid personal criticism and do not blame individuals.
 - Don't talk about 'what should have happened'. What's done is done and we don't have a time machine. Instead make suggestions for what could happen in the future.
 - Remember the limitations on the campaign in terms of resources (human and financial), time, political context etc. The purpose of the debrief is not to compare the campaign to a mythical ideal campaign, so stay practical.

- If the result was disappointing, give people context they may be missing. The odds are generally stacked against progressive change, there are some things we can impact and others that are outside our control. Keep the long view.
- Give people time in pairs or small groups as well as the large group. This might mean gathering around roles or geography for differentiation and specificity, as well as time all together to have the sense of unity and community.
- Use activities that engage the heart, not just the head. For example:
 - Having paired check-ins around prompts like 'how have you been feeling since the election/end of campaign?'
 - Having a closing activity where people write appreciation notes to each other (in small teams each person could have an envelope or a poster that people add to, in a large team there could be a wall where appreciations get posted)
- Acknowledge the diverse range of contributions people made. For example:
 - Having an opening activity where people reflect on what contribution they made, write one thing down on paper, then mingle around the room sharing their contribution and celebrating each others
 - In a large group having people raise hands or stand up if they made particular contributions (eg 'stand up if you went doorknocking'; 'stand up if you talked to your friends about the campaign' etc)
- Start with what worked well. People may rush to what they perceive as gaps or deficits but it will make a big difference to the tone of the event and the overall learning if they can spend time noticing what went really well first.
- Allow space for people to say things that need to be said. Sometimes this can be emotional. Try to build a supportive space where it is ok for those feelings to come up. Just give it space and some quiet, rather than responding in a big way. If you are daunted by this think of who in your team has good skills in this area, and can be called on to help.
- Give people an opportunity to think about where to next for them. Are they stepping into a new role? Do they want to work on the next campaign? Are they taking a break now this campaign is over?
- Have a plan for how the results of the debrief will be collated. Can someone take on typing up the butchers paper? Is the purpose more about people getting to have their say, rather than creating a written record?

If you will be facilitating a campaign debrief and would like some support (feedback on session design, facilitation tips, handouts, and debriefing after the debrief!) contact Holly Hammond: 0421 508 446, holly@plantowin.net.au

Campaign Debrief Sample Agenda

	<p>Opening Welcome, Acknowledge Country Purpose Reminders/guidelines Activity around people's contributions to the campaign</p>
	<p>Your experience Pairs or small groups sharing about individual's experiences of the campaign. One or two prompts like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you been feeling since X? • Why did you get involved in this campaign? • What did you do? • What was your best experience as part of the campaign? • What's one thing you learnt, or one way you've grown, from this campaign? <p>Regroup to share some highlights and insights</p>
	<p>Campaign objectives Revisit what the campaign aimed to do, and what you know so far about whether that was met. (eg share what analysis you have, statistics on campaign contacts and volunteer recruitment etc)</p>
	<p>What worked and what to do differently in the future Depending on the size of the group this could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in the large group (start with what worked, scribe to whiteboard and discuss, then move on to what to do differently) • in small groups (provide butchers paper chart to scribe to) • discuss the campaign overall or • break into groups around roles or geography, using the same prompts of what worked well and what to do differently in the future
	<p>Other items to discuss or particular feedback to elicit</p>
	<p>Where to next Some brief announcement of the next time the group will meet, or a process for evaluation. Give people time to be ready for the next thing, just signal there will be other things to come, to address the sense of emptiness/aimlessness people can have when a campaign ends. Perhaps a paired check-in about 'My next step' or 'What's next for you now the campaign is over?'</p>
	<p>Appreciations/Celebration A process for people to appreciate or thank each other. This could be a time to formally acknowledge key people, while emphasising that all levels of contribution are valuable.</p>
	<p>Closing Make space for any last things that need to be said.</p>

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