



How will we use existing online tools to better advocate for change?

Online tools make it easier for an organization like Audubon to add individuals to our existing list of supporters by creating methods of recruitment and engagement. Email offers an easy and cost-effective means of communicating with your supporters, and offers them an easy and relatively non-labor intensive means of taking action on the issue that you have outlined as important. In contrast, direct mail or postcards, and even phone calls are much more time consuming and costlier methods of communicating the same message to your base of support. The other great thing about email messaging is that your email can be forwarded around to any network of people very easily and quickly, creating a viral effect commonly referred to as the “tell-a-friend” technique. If employed properly, this technique can dramatically boost the reach of your message with very little effort of your own. Be creative in this and look for existing models that you have seen on other’s websites that you think might work for you. Email is a great tool, and can be very effective in networking and increasing the reach of your appeals and messaging, but it is not meant to be used alone—it is a great supplemental method of outreach to your already existing face-to-face interactions with your activists and volunteers.

Tips on building your existing email list, and capturing emails to add to your list:

1. Start with those you know already support you.

Collect names on a sign-up sheet for your email activist network at Chapter meetings, events, fundraisers, bird walks, etc. Anywhere there are birders and Audubon supporters is a good place to collect names. Start with your chapter members and work out from there. Ask everyone to ask 5 people to join the list, or start an activist network committee and task them with growing your list.

2. Capture Emails on your website.

If your chapter has a website, use it to collect names of those that support the work you do. Ask your webmaster to put a place that is prominently located on your homepage where people can sign up to receive important news on what your chapter is doing and ways they can get involved. Collect these names and send them the info you said you would send. Give people ways to come and participate in the great work you are doing, and reach out to younger and diverse groups. Try to link your site to other similar group’s sites and/or university sites in your area. If your chapter does not have a website, see if the state office will put this up on their site and consider sending your chapter the names of people that sign up in your area.

3. If you do not have an activist list, consider starting one.

This doesn’t need to be anything fancy. It can be as easy as a spreadsheet with activist names and emails, and addresses/phone numbers if you can get them.

For the purpose of emailing out to this list, you can create a distribution list in Outlook or whatever mail system you use. This is the process of creating a list that you can send your updates and activist pleas out to without having to enter in the individual names each time. Once you create your distribution list and name it, you can easily send communications to this list in no time at all, and you can quickly add new members periodically as you get them.

4. Set up a chapter “listserve” or chat group.

If you are interested in doing this, you can set up a “listserve” so that the communications can be a more of a two-way interface. When you send something out to the listserve, people who are on that list can respond back to the list and create a discussion. You can do this easily for free with services like “Yahoo Groups” or some state offices may have registered listserve addresses you can use, but otherwise there may be costs associated with setting that up.

Combat Activist Fatigue

Here are some tips to hopefully make your advocacy communications more effective in reaching your target audience, and to avoid burning out your activists.

- If you have multiple actions for your supporters to do within a small period of time, try sending a unique email with one or two things for them to do to a segmented portion of your list, then the other action items to another segment. For example, you want people to take action on Arctic, ESA, and Everglades in the same week. If you have the capability, send an action alert to 30% of your list with the Arctic appeal, then 30% for ESA, etc. This way, your audience is more focused on the most important thing they can do to help, and they will be more likely to actually do something. If you send something out saying pick from these six urgent action items, a lot of people get overwhelmed and will not do anything, plus even if they pick one or two, there are four left that get no attention.
- Send regular e-newsletters giving updates on the campaigns you are working on. This could be every month, every two months, or whenever you are able, but not more frequently than every two weeks. In these, give your supporters updates about what their activism has accomplished recently, and what they should expect to hear from you about in the near future, then send out action alerts on pressing issues as you need to.
- If you don't have anything important to send to your list, don't send it just because you are on a specific schedule.
- Give your supporters an easy way to opt-in to more updates, or to the national/local chapter e-activist list, and also to opt-out of any communications, as well as an easy unsubscribe function.
- Don't over use your activists. Be selective as to what is really critical to send to your list. You can always inform and give people the option to participate, but sending more than one action alert a week is too much. Sometimes making phone calls to your activists or sending a personal email to them from your account is a better way to get them to take action on a particular item. Don't over use email.

- Try to solicit feedback from your supporters whenever possible. Ask them to give you information on themselves, and whether or not they feel like they could do more, or whether they are overwhelmed, so that you can better custom tailor your communications to what they want. Happy activists= good, engaged activists.

Communicate results to your participants

It is critical to close the loop on your communications to your supporters. It is important to communicate the urgency of your appeal for action during the campaign, but it is equally as important to let your participants know the impact that they had, and the integral role they played in achieving your goals after the requested action has been taken and the results have been established. Feel free to disclose the number of letters generated or phone calls made, petition signatures, etc. (as long as this information is not strategically sensitive), or what exactly the outcome of the campaign was. This will illustrate to them the direct impact of their time and effort, and show your appreciation for their help, and will further invest them personally in the goals of this campaign if there are more actions ahead that you will be asking for, or in general support of future action requests by your organization.

Use Email with Respect and Avoid Spam Filters

Issues of privacy online are increasingly important for people, for the senders and receivers of email. So when you ask someone for their email, try to be as clear as you can about what you intend to do with it. In the first email that person receives from you, you should outline what your intentions are with regard to sharing their email with other coalition partners (not recommended), or how people can “opt-out” or “opt-in” from this and other lists that your organization holds. Also make sure that there is a way that people can contact you with complaints. We don’t want people to feel like their email address is being abused, or that they are being ignored, so just try to be as transparent as possible from the get-go and you will be better served with happy email recipients. A good suggestion is to create a privacy statement on your website that people can refer to before the sign up to your lists.

After all the hard work you have put into communicating with your supporters, the last thing you want is for your email to end up in someone’s trash folder because of their spam filters. The user establishes the criteria that the spam filter will react to and consequently delete messages that meet those criteria. So, in order to avoid meeting those criteria, make sure that your “From”, “To”, and “Subject” lines in your email communications are in compliance with best practices for mass email. This means that your “From” line should clearly identify you or your organization so that there is no doubt about who the email is from. When sending to a large list, we recommend that you put yourself in the “To” field and put everyone else in the “Bcc” field. This way you protect the privacy of your supporters, and if you put a bunch of names in the “To” field it will automatically trip the recipients Spam filters. The “Subject” line should identify the purpose of the communication, and especially if it is an e-newsletter it is a good idea to include the issue date. This should help keep your emails in the inbox where you want them and not in the trash.