



# BUILDING UNION POWER Online

EXPANDING AND ENGAGING MEMBERS IN THE 2013 FEDERAL ELECTION



## INTRODUCTION

I'm pleased to present the ACTU Digital Team's post-election report.

The 2013 Federal Election was the first time unions in Australia ran a serious, movement-wide online campaign. The ACTU invested significant resources in a whole new frontier of organising -- bringing together 14 people -- experienced campaigners, social media and online experts, programmers, a videographer, graphic designer and a team of individuals unions identified to be mentored and taught online campaigning through their time with the team. I have been proud to head up this team for the final eight weeks along with Aaron Hulse -- the Digital Election Director -- also seconded from the ASU.

Online organising and campaigning brings a new medium and new tools to what we, as a movement, do extremely well: bring individuals together to increase their collective power and run campaigns. The online environment allows us to do many of the things we do "offline" with greater speed, innovation and in a way that overcomes issues of distance and time. Groups of union members can come together and share their views, sign up to support a campaign and share the message of the union movement easily and quickly.

Political parties and movements across the world now engage and run campaigns online. In this election campaign, we have shown that our movement can be at the forefront of this in Australia, and around the world, by marrying our extensive organising wisdom with the tools and innovation of the online world. Social media is about people engaging with each other and in groups, and Australian unions are experts at this -- afterall, our movement has been doing this for nearly 200 years! We have taken what we do so well everyday in workplaces, industries and communities into the digital realm.

We have built an awesome force of union members and supporters online -- through both our email list and social media channels -- in a relatively short period of time. We have engaged thousands of young people -- many for the first time -- in union movement activity. Our Facebook page receives more engagement and more shares by far, than any page of similar size and we now out-gun many political parties and other organisation-based Facebook communities in Australia -- and we have only been around a short time.

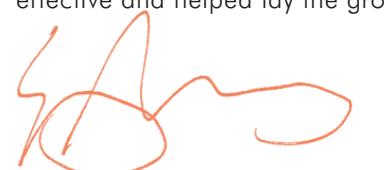
Our message urging working Australians not to trust Abbott with our rights at work and the agenda of big business reached more than a million people per

week by the end of the campaign. The resources we have built, the messages we have developed and the education we have done with tens of thousands of union activists and their friends via our digital campaign has laid the groundwork for the fight ahead.

Some organisations only campaign online. This is not our movement. We are a movement in workplaces, industries and communities. This is, and should always be, our primary place of organising. Digital campaigning should complement and add to our capacity to achieve our goals, and we've shown our movement can be as effective as the very best online campaigners.

Through the investment of the ACTU in building the movement's online campaign capacity, we have opened up a whole new front our fight for a better world and better life for our members. We have built an extra and potentially powerful force, as well as expertise, which will be key in the years ahead.

There are many people who assisted us throughout this campaign. In particular I'd like to thank Paul Mackay and Daniel Stone who were a part of our leadership group; Manic Studios and their team -- Piers Groves, Paul Day, Collin Jensen, Sarah Phillips and Harry Sanna; our online campaigners -- Cameron Ritchie, Kate Brandreth, Nagida Clark, Pat McDermott, Pedro Varela de Matos, Samuel Kiejda; Mark Lennon and UnionsNSW staff; Michael Flinn; Mark Phillips; Ged Kearney; Dave Oliver; Tim Chapman; Daniel Moohkey; George Simon; Sarah O'Leary; Luke Hilakari; Mick De Brenni; Janet Giles; Andrew Casey; Mich-Elle Myers; Greig McGlinchey Kelbie; Ben Davison; ACTU contact centre staff; Sarah Lonsdale; Eleni Hale and the 62 Facebook admins from unions across the country that made what we did even more effective and helped lay the groundwork for even greater things in the future.



Sally McManus  
Secretary  
ASU NSW & ACT Branch

# STRENGTHENING OUR MOVEMENT

## ONLINE COMMUNITY

The Australian Unions online community has grown exponentially over the last four months, expanding from 60,914 email contacts and 8,000 Facebook contacts to an email list of 97,945 and just over 55,000 Facebook supporters (for a total of 152,945). As such the ACTU's total community has increased by 120% since May (a 60% increase on email and 588% increase on Facebook, respectively).

To ensure our content was tailored to our community, we conducted weekly surveys with a small sample of our list after a major full list survey in June. This allowed us to identify key demographic information (left) as well as track values, attitudes and priorities of the community as the campaign grew and evolved. During the course of the campaign, every contact was asked once to participate, with an average response of 20%.



## COMMUNITY COHESION AND UNION PRIDE

As the community rapidly expanded, we focused on building a sense of solidarity and belonging amongst our membership. This was achieved through actions which encouraged participation and ownership over the campaign, such as inviting members to define a collective term for the community (a “pride”), giving members a say regarding the message on our mobile billboards, and allowing the community to decide which advertisement to run in *The Australian*.

## COMMUNITY MODERATION

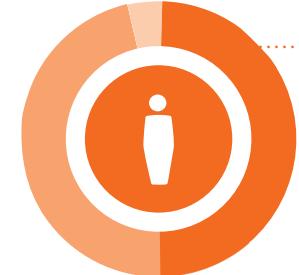
A community of this size presented an additional challenge - becoming a target for right-wing trolls and anti-union forces keen to vent their anger or disrupt our organising. In order to continue building our power and maintain a safe and welcoming space for our community, we recruited and developed a moderation team to ensure a leadership presence on the page at all times - hiding provocative comments (including racist, sexist and homophobic remarks) and banning users with a clear anti-union agenda. We aimed to keep our community troll free which is essential to on-line community building.

This moderation team was organised through a private Facebook group, which coordinated a roster of both paid staff and volunteers to provide coverage from 9am - 9pm, 7 days a week.

## POPULAR FORMS OF ACTION

Throughout the campaign, members and supporters were asked to undertake a variety of actions to support and promote the campaign. These varied from lower barrier asks (such as sharing content or signing a petition) to higher barrier asks (donating time or money). We discovered members responded particularly well to asks with a clear outcome (i.e. Donate \$10 to help us run our ad nationally) and that each action had a long tail (indeed we continued to receive signatures on petitions long after the critical moment for action).

Beyond social sharing, petitions were by far our most popular form of online action, with 5,732 actions (and many new sign-ups). This is followed by donations, where 1,298 people offered to support our campaign financially. Finally, volunteer asks prompted 1,414 people to step up and take action in their local communities.



### GENDER

- Male 51%
- Female 48%
- Undisclosed 1%



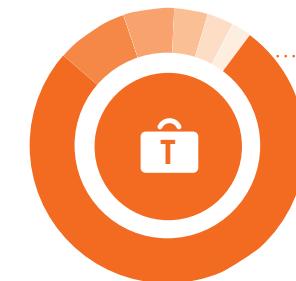
### EMPLOYMENT STATUS

- Employed 79%
- Unemployed 12%
- Retired 4%
- Disabled 3%
- Carer 1%
- Student 1%



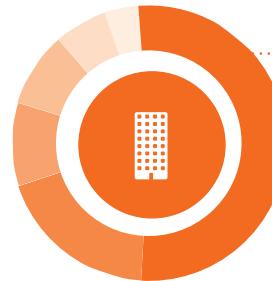
### EMPLOYMENT RATE

- Full Time 75%
- Part Time 25%



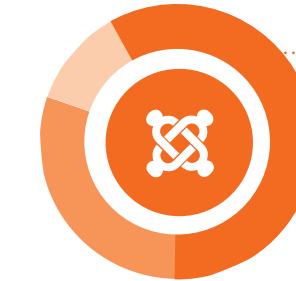
### EMPLOYMENT TYPE

- Permanent 85%
- Casual 5%
- Fixed Term 4%
- Business Owner 3%
- Contractor 2%
- Temp 1%



### EMPLOYER

- Government 59%
- Private (100+) 18%
- NFP 12%
- Self Employed 6%
- Private (<= 20) 3%
- Private (20-100) 3%



### UNION MEMBERSHIP

- Union Member 77%
- Past Member 20%
- Never 2%



### VOTER ID

- Labor 69%
- Greens 21%
- Independent 4%
- Liberal 3%
- Katter 2%
- Nationals 1%
- Palmer 1%

## CAPACITY BUILDING

### DEVELOPING THE TEAM AND CAMPAIGN PROCESSES

In addition to our direct election organising, we also aimed to build the union movement's digital campaigning capacity across the board. This involved developing processes and technology platforms, while conducting an extensive training. The team was formed from scratch, thanks to organisers seconded from, or sponsored by affiliates. This resulted in junior staff with little past experience but a keen desire and dedication to making a difference.

To help raise the bar early in the campaign, the leadership team developed and deployed a five week training curriculum offered to affiliate unions via webcast. This training program covered fundamentals in digital organising such as basic concepts, email writing and strategy, social media content and strategy as well as analytics and targeting.

After the ALP leadership change in late June, the campaign underwent a major calibration. With Sally McManus joining the team, the campaign sharpened its focus on the 5 major threats to rights at work identified in the Coalition's IR policy document. An ongoing education campaign was conducted for our online community and organiser briefings were held by Sally in each capital city -- so organisers understood the online campaign, and had the language and tools needed to support our content and messaging.

With this strong foundation, we then implemented a number of best practices and processes - developing a content and messaging calendar which allowed us to strategically educate supporters, a moderation process to keep our community healthy and a testing and refinement regime to ensure our messages were relevant to members and our actions effective.

## TOOLS

To expand the capacity of the union movement's digital organising effort into the future, we developed four tools which engage members and encourage them to take action online and off.

### "WRITE FOR YOUR RIGHTS"



The media played a major advocacy role in this election, and motivated the development of the "Write for Your Rights" tool, allowing online activists to take direct action. Members are able to easily email their local newspapers or major state daily's -- offering their unique take on the issue of the day or to promote ongoing campaigns. This tool was also repurposed to support the CFMEU's campaign against Xstrata's Collinsville mine closure so members and supporters could directly email the Xstrata area manager.

### "YOUR VOICE, YOUR VOTE" VISUAL SURVEY



To improve completion rates on our first major survey of members we developed a visual survey tool. By creating a tool which provided an interesting and narrative-driven experience, we significantly improved our data-analytics and demographic profile.

### UNION COMPASS



This tool is designed to help motivate the transfer from online action to face-to-face organising -- easily showing users where their nearest protests, door-knocking events, phone banks, or meetings are being held. From within the tool members are easily able to RSVP and then get updates from the appropriate target seat coordinator.

### SIGN AND DESIGN



This tool introduces the energy and diversity of our movement to members who are more comfortable taking action online than in the streets. The tool functions in a similar way to a traditional petition, but encourages users to express their motivation for signing on a shareable tile. As thousands of people take action, the page fills with diverse messages similar to the sea of placards we're familiar with seeing at rallies or other traditional public gatherings.

# PEOPLE POWER: WORKERS' VOICE, WORKERS' VOTE

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The digital election effort was a visible, public-facing initiative of the ACTU's overall election effort -- expanding the community, engaging union members and supporters online, whilst complementing the communications and field teams' campaign initiatives.

## DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

Early communications focused on approximately 60,000 members remaining from 2007's Your Rights at Work campaign, with an emphasis on building a sense of community, shared values and low-barrier actions such as petitions, to re-engage longer-term members while recruiting new individuals to the list.

We employed various other actions, such as full list and weekly surveys, to not only ensure buy-in and a sense of ownership within the list, but also to aggregate further data on list members, in order to better understand our audience and analyse which issues would prove most salient and which messages would be most potent once the official election campaign commenced.

Analysing list actions and data, once the official campaign began on August 4th, we re-calibrated our message to match the moment, employing a strategy aimed at generating collective online action, through educating and engaging our base -- union members and supporters -- by distilling the Coalition's IR policy into five key threats to our rights at work that underlined the personal risk to working people inherent in a vote for Abbott.

As this strategy was adopted by a larger audience, including affiliates and the overall Australian Unions' campaign, we helped coordinate a strategic message calendar, and produced various publications and public actions -- both online and offline -- to ensure our message reached as many Australians as possible in the critical 33 days of the election campaign.



## ONLINE TO OFFLINE CONVERSION

With nearly two million union members around the country and 19 Target Seat Coordinators across 35 key marginal electorates, complementing the offline efforts of the field team through online tools, action and volunteer recruitment was a key component of our digital strategy.

### TELE-TOWNHALLS

As the field team prepared to hold a series of telephone town halls engaging supporters around the country, the digital team generated hundreds of online RSVPs, and live-tweeted all three tele-town halls, as well as helped coordinate accepting and answering member questions via Twitter.



### MOBILISATION FOCUSED

While online to offline conversion was a key component throughout the campaign, it became especially important in the final few weeks of the election. Firmly focused on outcomes, during the election period we recruited a total of 1384 volunteers through online actions, produced a national print ad which doubled as a poster that members proudly displayed in workplaces, and emailed nearly 100,000 supporters urging them to join a local event or create their own election event by handing out flyers and fact sheets we produced in their own community.



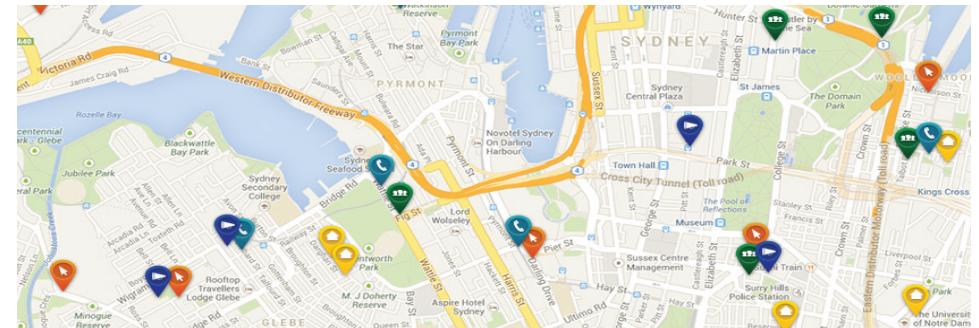
### ACTIVIST MEETUPS

With activist meetups taking place in key target seats, the digital team put out a call to nearly 11,000 online supporters asking them to host an event and produced a video featuring ACTU President Ged Kearney that thousands of union members and activists viewed at meetups in communities across the country.



### UNION COMPASS

With an eye to the future, we began development early on of a geo-location tool that would allow supporters anywhere in the country to easily find and attend union election events by postcode or suburb. Collaborating with Target Seat Coordinators, UnionCompass.org.au featured 233 election events, generated more than 300 RSVPs, and remains an ever-green tool ready for utilisation by the ACTU and affiliates for local, legislative and election fights of the future.



# DIGITAL CAMPAIGN

The Digital Team sent 97 list emails over the course of the campaign, reaching 1.78 million supporters, generating 32,287 actions (including \$45,329 in donations) produced 14 videos, nearly 500 pieces of creative social media content, and even garnered national news coverage of our online community.

## ACTION CENTRE

Wanting to create a “one-stop shop” for members to engage in the election campaign, we developed a Digital Action Centre ([act.australianunions.org.au](http://act.australianunions.org.au)) housing campaign actions, creative collateral, and the ability to donate or volunteer -- providing multiple avenues through which members could support the election effort.

Post-election, the Action Centre remains the hub for everything supporters need to fight for their rights in workplaces, communities and even Canberra.

## CREATIVE CONTENT

The Digital Team housed two staff streams -- politically-minded campaigners and creative producers -- and benefitted immensely from this coupling of substance and style.

Throughout the campaign we adopted an approach with the clear aim of what might best be called “show don’t tell” -- in other words, we didn’t simply say that Tony Abbott would be bad for working people, but rather showed the tangible harms of a Coalition Government through member-focused stories on film. This approach not only allowed us to utilise unions’ greatest strength -- our people -- but ensure our audience saw creative products that were genuine and spoke to them, because the people speaking on camera were just like them. Rather than inventing fictitious narratives, our creative products showed real Australians, reflecting the diversity and strength of the movement through their experiences and the stories they shared.

While film was an incredibly powerful campaign communications tool, design was key to distilling detailed policy positions throughout the election. Producing more than 22 pieces of unique content per week, design proved critical in creative products that both built solidarity amongst union members online, as well as provided sharable content that helped spread the message of our campaign while ensuring an ever-expanding Facebook presence that grew by 588%, topping 55,000 supporters by Election Day. Additional content -- policy fact sheets, Penalty Rates Day of Action collateral, posters and print ads -- complimented the efforts of the organising team in target seats and all Australian Unions members with resources available to any supporter via the Action Centre.

## FUNDRAISING

While online action was familiar to many supporters, our list had not received direct donation asks prior to the election; as such, we employed a multi-faceted approach to fundraising aiming to test various asks, while also yielding tangible results in terms of dollars raised and politically potent products seen by supporters and the public at large.

While the list showed a willingness to chip in for general support asks (donating nearly \$3500 for the Election Fighting Fund, and \$5100 off the back of weekly surveys), our greatest success came via specific asks around hard-hitting creative products and innovative actions that helped get our message out, with more than \$14,000 donated to follow Tony Abbott with mobile billboards, and over \$19,000 raised to run a national print ad in *The Australian* just days before the election. The latter action also tested giving the online community a choice in the content they were helping fund, showing great promise for giving the online community a say in initiatives seeking their support.

With nearly 1300 donors and more than \$45,000 raised, expectations regarding both testing and tangible outcomes were exceeded during the election campaign.

## PRE-POSITIONING

From the inception of the team, polls were consistently forecasting a Coalition win. Ceding no ground during the election, we made a concerted effort to ensure our content and creative output was timely and targeted to the election fight, while helping build a baseline a knowledge regarding the policies the predicted Abbott Government would implement.

Tailoring our content and communications to our online community was only possible thanks to weekly tracking surveys of members professional profiles, campaign priorities, and voting intention. Having a clear idea of the demographic make-up and union density of our community was key to providing election messages and actions, that engaged and educated our members in the lead-up to September 7th and beyond.

Through forethought and pre-positioning, our members were equipped to better understand and advocate on workplace policy issues -- both during and after the election -- leaving the union movement (and our members) in a better position to beat back any threats to our rights at work and ready for fights that may lie ahead.

# YouTube

**50,446** TOTAL VIEWS

## RECRUITMENT



**1382**  
NEW VOLUNTEERS  
**45,330**  
EMAIL LIST GROWTH

## CAMPAIGN Snapshots

### FUNDRAISING

**1298 DONORS**  
**\$45,301 RAISED**  
AVG. DONATION \$29.10

## facebook

**8,000**  
to **57,000**

JUN JUL AUG SEP

UNIVERSE

JUN JUL AUG SEP

SHARES

JUN JUL AUG SEP

COMMENTS

JUN JUL AUG SEP

LIKES

*Total Reach : 17.5 MILLION*

## Action Centre

### WEB TRAFFIC

**26,943** People Visited the Site

Resulting in **49,423** Page Views

**20%** RETURNING VISITORS

**80%** NEW VISITORS

## Email



OPEN  
RATES

CLICK  
RATES

CONVERSION  
RATES

## TRENDING ON twitter



#CANTTRUSTABBOTT



#ABBOTTWINSYOULOSE

# SUCCESS INTO THE FUTURE

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### ENSURE CONTENT BALANCE AND CLARITY

While much of the election strategy was based around the threat of an Abbott Government -- and therefore fit into a largely negative frame -- online communities need positive content to balance some of the negativity, keep things fresh, and remind them of the positive sides of unions (i.e. we're not just an insurance policy against bad things happening at work).

Positive content helps build union pride, educate newer members around union history, and builds a sense of solidarity among members -- just as, if not more important, to the sustainability of the community. Constantly being in fight mode or will burn people out and the saliency and urgency of each ask wanes, without moments of positivity to remind members of our proud past, and previous victories helping re-energise them for the fights ahead.

Furthermore, it's worth noting that, whether positive or negative, less can often be more in terms of online messaging. A straightforward style that underscores key messages or policy points work well with members, and help distill often complicated, detailed news and policy into digestible content that our members understand and share. More detail can always be provided in the post (or links contained within the post) but creative online content should generally err on the side of simple and straightforward -- teasing toward greater detail if necessary -- playing toward the short, pithy nature of the mediums, rather than lengthy and nuanced.

### GREATER CLARITY ON CAMPAIGN STRATEGY, MESSAGING AND PLAN FOR DIGITAL INTEGRATION WITH BROADER COMMUNICATIONS.

We must first understand the difference between digital and traditional communications, in that material prepared for television or offline dissemination should be different to material consumed online. A more irreverent and conversational tone works more effectively online, and online material should be kept emotive or humorous, simplistic and clear.

Once that distinction is made, it is important to work within a framework and apply campaign strategy to a timeline or calendar. This was implemented and executed to great effect upon Sally's entry into the team, in which she outlined "Abbott's Five Points" plan and all further online communications were shaped around one or all of these points. It gave the digital team a focus it lacked prior to that point, clearly delineating the electoral outcome desired as well as the issues around which we engaged members. We recommend subsequent ACTU election teams, work collaboratively to craft campaign strategy, messaging, and build communications, organising and online action, as well as most content -- leaving enough flexibility for rapid-response opportunities -- around an integrated election calendar in a similar fashion.

### REVIEW AND REFINE THE TEAM STRUCTURE

While we understood the motivation for upskilling young campaigners, subsequent digital teams should reassess whether this is the best and most efficient use of limited time and financial resources.

Learning on the job is effective but time consuming, and while the team produced promising young digital campaigners, this came at a great cost in terms of the leadership team's time and attention to training, which at times -- especially early on -- limited the team's output.

In future, we'd suggest a smaller, more nimble team of a few skilled campaigners - perhaps paired one on one with a member of the leadership team, allowing for mentoring while also serving as a support in research content creation and the like. With a smaller team of campaigners, we would suggest thinking critically about hiring additional creative staff, helping increase output, content and providing redundancy within the team (i.e. if a graphic designer is sick, someone with a similar set of skills can cover). A team of this size would be smaller, while likely producing greater amounts of higher-quality content with more time for everyone on the team to focus on campaigning rather than a training curriculum -- the latter of which should be developed in the interim, but the former being the focus during the intensity of an election campaign.

## GREATER COMMUNICATION/INTEGRATION BETWEEN TEAMS

The campaign began strongly with numerous meetings between the team leads (communications, field, digital, data) and an expressed goal of integration between the teams; those intentions, however, did not become as fully realised as all had hoped, with collaborative cross-team meetings waning or disappearing altogether and very little routine communication or coordination between teams.

In future, we'd advocate for one, integrated election strategy that structurally incorporates the communications, data, digital and field teams in thoughtful ways that complement the work of each team, make processes more efficient, and fully utilise the benefit of such a robust and diverse set of skills, leaders and teams. We'd also advocate for resuming regular team-lead morning check-ins, where the agenda is clearly defined for the day, across teams and communications strategy, so the same message is online, on the ground and on the airwaves or front-pages.

An additional recommendation, that may help further integrate the teams, is the creation of a "war room" true to its title: namely one central campaign headquarters where ACTU leadership and the team leads gather daily -- as well as in rapid-response moments -- to quickly work through a coordinated response, ensuring the most is made of moments of opportunity, and crises are quickly dealt with to mitigate damage.

## KICK OFF THE TEAM EARLIER

Every election effort benefits by expanding the timeframe under which teams are constituted, strategy crafted, and campaign plans executed.

In future, the campaign will be an even more powerful force if both the team and strategy build (across communications, field, data and digital) occur earlier. This will allow for greater team cohesion and testing, providing ample time to refine messages as well as tactics before reaching the critical last 90 days.

## PLANS FOR BOTH TARGET SEATS AND NON-TARGET SEATS

Throughout the election campaign, various moments arose in which key actions and events were only available or truly engaging to a very small segment of the list, and the broader member community across the country. While inevitable that a small number of marginal seats will dictate the outcome of elections -- members and supporters outside those seats should be considered and given meaningful opportunities for engagement in their communities, workplaces and online as well. As such, we advocate focusing a majority of time and resources on key marginals, while also creating a less resource-intense plan for engagement and election materials for members and supporters in non-targeted seats. It will engage a wider-base of support, by building a more robust set of activists throughout the country primed to engage and even mobilise post-election to protect hard won gains, or hold the line in future legislative or industrial battles.

## COPUPLE INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE WITH INNOVATION

We found it difficult at times to operate within the union movement, having instead come from the broader progressive community. This was not simply tied to messaging and the way unions talk about unions but more importantly access to affiliates and members as well.

This again was vastly improved on Sally's arrival. Having the trust of the union leadership and comprehensive knowledge of the movement, Sally could not only grease wheels of approval but also open doors to affiliate unions and members.

The key to success this election was the pairing of someone with experience, institutional knowledge and understanding of the movement, coupled with a team adept in new media and online campaigning. We highly recommend including this set of skills within any future team from inception to increase success even further.

## LEVERAGE GROWTH FROM EXISTING NETWORKS BEFORE BUDGETING FOR IT

With a short time-frame -- only four months -- to build and engage an online community of supporters, it's understandable that allocating resources to this effort was seen as the most expedient route. While that effort was largely successful in boosting supporters both on social media as well as the email list, future list growth should focus on leveraging growth from existing affiliate networks -- the union movement actually has the largest membership base and therefore database in the country. We should look to utilise this before looking to spend money on outside organisations (like Change.org) to building lists for us.

Instructive examples include the adaption of the "Write for Your Rights" tool, into a tool the CFMEU used to engage members around Collinville as well as the network of Union Facebook administrators that Sally created and coordinated throughout the campaign. Each was a win-win for the ACTU, as well as affiliates: the CFMEU was able to generate action around an issue key to their members, and many of these became part of the bigger ACTU list. Similarly, affiliate union Facebook admins were incredibly grateful to be given high quality, timely content for their pages, while the ACTU was able to have an exponentially greater reach among key constituencies and set the tone each day of the election campaign, with affiliates helping disseminate a more consistent message and helping drive greater traffic and likes to the ACTU page.

While Change.org, paid Facebook likes and Facebook post boosting were useful and should be considered in future, it should be a secondary focus in the interim between elections, as many existing networks are active, passionate and data-rich. The ACTU can play a key leadership role here - -providing compelling content and actions, while benefiting from a consolidated index of online members and supporters.

