

ACTIVATE AUDIENCES ONLINE

Moving Supporters Up the Ladder of Engagement.



What is the Ladder of Engagement?

The “Ladder of Engagement” is a strategy for enhancing supporter involvement by starting with simple asks (the lower rungs of the ladder) and building up to more demanding asks (higher rungs) with each action that your supporters take. The 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign [capitalized on this digital strategy](#) to build a grassroots movement of motivated and engaged volunteers and small-dollar donors throughout the country.

Every organization will have different levels of supporter engagement, but most will have a pattern similar to this proverbial ladder. The majority of supporters will fall under “inactives” and “listeners” – the two lowest rungs on the ladder.

- Inactives are on the email list or have looked at your social media pages, but have not engaged with your content.
- Listeners follow you on social media but rarely engage.
- Sharers like and share content from social media channels or emails.
- Evangelists engage beyond the digital world by attending events.
- Instigators join in the work as a champion or donor for the issue.

Should I Use the Ladder of Engagement?

Absolutely! Using ladders of engagement ensures that your digital work ultimately supports your larger goals. Instead of shooting off an email or a Facebook post without giving thought to strategy, use a ladder to help bring more supporters into the action. You should develop specific ladders for when you gain a large influx of supporters, such as through a successful event, social media campaign, report releases or a paid supporter-acquisition campaign.

Building a ladder after one of these moments is easy because you know exactly why and how these supporters became involved with your organization. However, knowing where your supporters stand, what asks you’re making and where you want them to end up is important. You also should make sure your supporters don’t fall off the ladder once they reach the top rung. Develop a plan to keep them engaged even after they have done what you asked them to do.

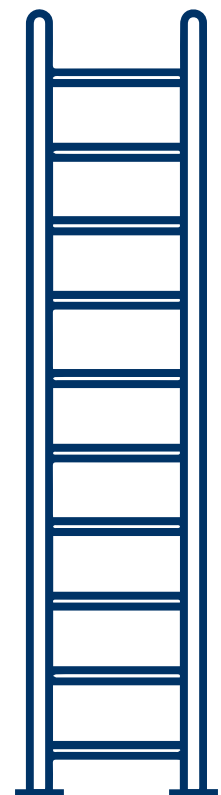
Defining Your Ladder

Before you can start moving people up your ladder, determine the right levels of engagement. Consider what you ultimately need your supporters to do. Is it to donate? Write a letter to the editor of their local paper? Organize their friends and neighbors to join in the work?

The final step on your ladder should align with your overall communication strategy. (For more on how to build a S.M.A.R.T. and strategic communication plan, check out [Spitfire’s Smart Chart®](#).) Once you have established the highest rung, work backwards to determine the steps a supporter should take to get there.

1. **Welcome:** Become a Facebook fan or follow us on Twitter. This ask is easy. People won’t feel like you’re asking too much, but it will make them feel just a bit closer to your work and help them learn more about what you do.
2. **Learn:** Visit our website to watch a video and learn about our other programs. This ask should be a way to begin drawing in inactives. They’ve heard from you already and have shown that they’re willing to participate. Give them the opportunity to learn more about you.
3. **Send/share:** Tell your friends why you care about [our issue]; share a post or photo on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Now that listeners have demonstrated support, turn them into sharers.

Having listeners share content about why this issue is important and who it impacts will engage supporters and encourage their friends to get involved to expand your base further.



4. **Remote action:** Sign a petition supporting this legislation or call your member of Congress. Petition signing is a further step up your engagement ladder and will not take supporters more than a few minutes to complete. You can ask them to complete a few similar asks before moving up to the next step – to take action offline.
5. **Attend:** Join a house party or host your own to introduce others to the cause. Supporters who continuously engage could be ready to become evangelists and move beyond online or remote actions to join in person. Not everyone will have the time or ability to attend every action, but offer supporters a few opportunities to work around their schedules.
6. **Organize:** Attend a lobby day to encourage your legislators to support the bill. This high-level ask may intimidate some supporters, but since you have moved them up the ladder with you, they're more likely to feel comfortable and accepting of your organization by this point. You've transformed a name on a list into an actively engaged volunteer – an Instigator!

Realize that not all engagement ladders will look the same. If your goal is a fundraising push, turning people into donors could work very differently depending upon your goal and the time you have to work supporters up the ladder.

Deepening Engagement

Once you've established the rungs on your ladder, here are a few tips to remember as you move people up.



+Timing matters.

Space out your asks so that supporters hear from you regularly, but not so often that they feel overwhelmed. Whether you're dealing with many new supporters all at once or a slower stream over time, make sure to reach out within the first week of their initial contact with your organization to welcome them. For people who don't immediately engage, contact them again in a couple of weeks to give them a second chance to participate. When you move up to bigger asks, spread them out a bit so that supporters don't constantly feel pressured. Make sure to take advantage of timing hooks. If the president just mentioned your issue in a major speech or there's big news related to your cause, send out an email to highlight the critical moment and include a simple ask.



+Messengers can make all the difference.

Especially the first time that you're reaching out to someone, they may not know much about your organization. If you've gotten an email list through a partner organization, ask if you can include that group in your first outreach or get one of your more prominent spokespeople to author the first email. People will be more likely to respond to someone they know.



+Be grateful.

Reinforce your supporters' actions by thanking them and demonstrating the impact of their work. Highlight big wins or milestones, but also be sure to send periodic "Thank you's" to make sure that your supporters know that you value their work. Especially when you've had a victory, capitalize on the positive moment to inspire additional actions.



+Listen and assess.

Keep checking your levels of engagement over time and pay attention to what type of content and actions are motivating your audiences. You can use email analytics through your email provider to see who is opening your emails, clicking on them and ultimately following through with your asks. If you seem to be losing people at a certain rung of the ladder, try adding an intermediate ask to make people more comfortable as they approach that level.