



# AUDIENCE MAPPING

## WORKBOOK

HOW TO IDENTIFY, UNDERSTAND  
AND CONNECT WITH THE RIGHT  
STAKEHOLDERS FOR YOUR  
CAMPAIGNS AND PROJECTS

# It's important to know your audience

Whether you're carrying out an organisational review, developing your digital strategy or designing a new campaign, knowing who influences you and who you influence helps you understand the potential impact of your actions.

We find that a powerful approach to understanding your stakeholders is to view them as parts of a wider ecosystem. To do this, we start with a group mapping exercise. The power of the group process means you're more likely to uncover the best information and the learning goes much deeper. Once you've defined the audience, you can go on to identify relationships, who influencers who and then to develop appropriate messages and channels to connect with them.

This guide will introduce you to a step-by-step process for audience mapping that consists of three simple stages:

1. Identify your stakeholders
2. Define their proximity to you, your campaign or project
3. Describe the relationships within your stakeholder eco-system.

Having helped you to describe your stakeholder eco-system, this guide then goes on to help you define those stakeholders in more detail, understand their influence, influences and values and then position them in relation to your campaign or communications strategy.

Having a strong understanding of your ecosystem means your strategy, project or campaign can be better targeted and more focussed for the maximum impact and return.

# What is Audience Mapping?

We developed the Audience Map over ten years ago as a fast and effective way for groups to identify and visually represent stakeholders and their relationships to each other, the campaign, project, process or organisation.

The audience map works through a visual metaphor of concentric circles that identify our relationships at four levels, working from the centre out:

- Direct** People or groups who directly interact with the project/campaign.
- Indirect** People or groups who do not directly interact with the project but exercise strong influence over (or are strongly influenced/affected by) direct users.
- Remote** People or groups who remain at a distance from the project but could be affected/influenced by the project (or vice versa, could indirectly affect/influence).
- Societal** Wider societal influences. Usually macro, they have no direct impact or influence and are themselves either not affected by or very indirectly affected by the system. This might include legislators or local authorities, quality assurance agencies or professional governing bodies and typical refers to a macro-level change or rule, law or policy has a trickle-down impact on this project.

These societal influences can often be broad categories (such as 'youth' or 'community') that you know about and want to connect with better. They will almost certainly contain more nuanced sub-categories and some of these will probably appear in the inner circles of your audience map.

**You create an audience map in  
three simple stages:**

IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCE

VALIDATE THE MAP

DEFINE THE RELATIONSHIPS

**Once you've done this you'll  
be better placed to:**

KNOW YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

UNDERSTAND THEIR INFLUENCE AND VALUE

**And then it's time to put it  
all together:**

SHAPE YOUR MESSAGE

TELL ME A STORY

## Create your Audience Map

It's a group process so we usually draw the Audience Map outline on a whiteboard but you can use an electronic template (we often use Microsoft Visio with a projector) or big sheets of paper too (just so long as everyone can see it clearly and there's plenty of room for writing – the bigger the better!).

Pens are fine but it also works well to use post-it notes for stakeholders. That way you can move them around as the group's understanding of the map and the process deepens. Take pictures too, these can form a useful record of your thinking!

Don't just aim for the obvious and try and push the boundaries! Consider what disagreement might occur as to the roles and relative influence of others. We will all approach this exercise from different points of view.

Don't dismiss difference, let it evolve through discussion and move towards consensus. Lack of awareness, limited exposure to a wider audience or failing to legitimate the role of people or groups for political or power reasons all lead to different weightings. But when this audience mapping exercise is carried out amongst a broad group it can lead to a more accurate, neutral and more widely accepted definition of your relationships, influences and influencers. It is also more likely to inform the group's own knowledge.

Don't let one person, or one way of thinking about the eco-system influence the outcome – stay open to new and diverse views of your world!

And try not to uncritically copy down lists of stakeholders that you already have, these are OK to use as a reminder but this will work better if it's a living map of your real world.

You now have three concentric circles, the innermost is labeled "direct", moving outwards to "indirect" and "remote". The layer outside the final circle is "societal". These layers visually represent distance from your organisation, campaign or project: the nearer the centre then the closer the stakeholder is (i.e. they have most impact/influence or are most impacted/influenced).

## Identify the Audience

Ask the group to suggest stakeholders and then nominate where they belong. Stakeholders can be people, organisations, media. Sometimes they can even be intangible objects too, such as Acts of Parliament, because they are a key influence on what you do (or you need to get one changed to succeed).

At this stage, it can work well to take a brainstorming approach. You don't need to question or challenge where things go. There's plenty of time later to refine the map (this is where post-it notes are useful!).

You can focus on one category at a time or just add the names as they come up. It is often easier to start with the "direct" stakeholders as they tend to be the more obvious and more readily drawn to mind because people are aware of who they are already – although there might be a few surprises by the time you've finished. This can act as a helpful warm-up for the rest of the process too.

As you work out through the circles, it can become increasingly challenging for the group to identify the audience. The brainstorming phase tends to last between 10 and 15 minutes but could be more depending on the nature of the group and the complexity of the project or campaign. Obviously, mapping stakeholders for the whole organisation is going to take you longer than for a small project or campaign.

## Review the Map

Once you've reached what feels like saturation point and no more new stakeholders are coming up, you can start to refine the process.

Don't give up too easily though – it tends to get harder the further out from the centre you go, so give it time!

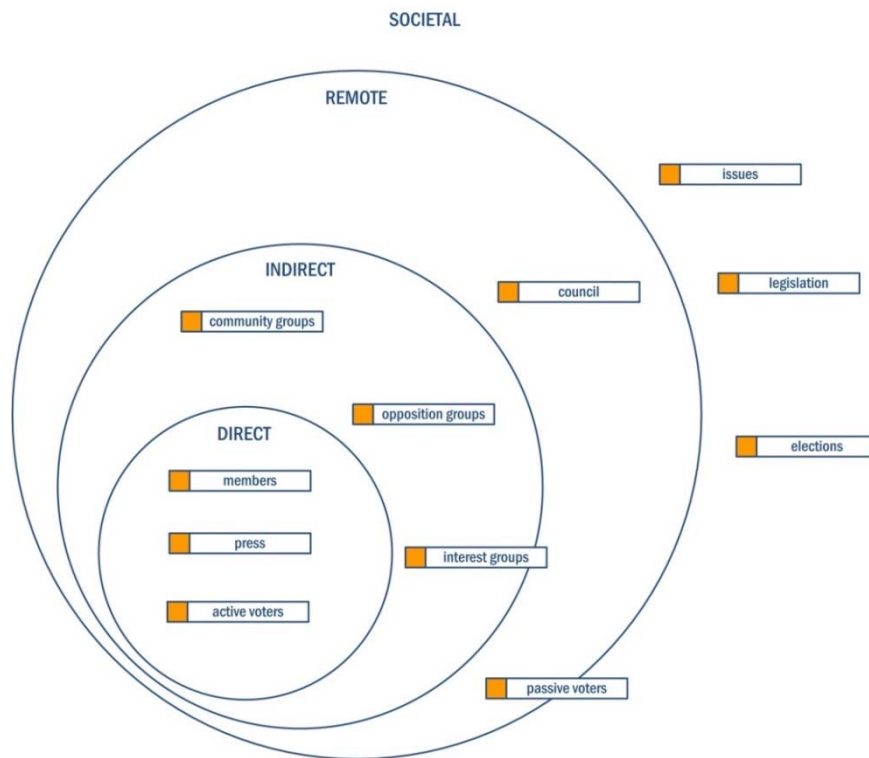
Ask the group to work through the stakeholders and confirm that they are happy with where they've been put. You're aiming for some reasonable group consensus here and, given that this model is always subjective, this shared understanding can be more important than absolute accuracy. Work from the centre outwards and, where there is disagreement, create the space for the group to explore and discuss.

You can also use this phase to merge entries and remove any duplication.

Remember this is not meant to be exhaustive or generic, it is intended to give you, your clients, key stakeholders and the team a clear and (most importantly) shared understanding of the campaign or project's stakeholders before you start making assumptions about what it is that you're doing and the impact that it will have.

There's no to be too fancy with the highlighting technique you choose so long as you know what it means (hint: write this down somewhere).

Let's look at an example using a real (but simplified) Audience Map for a start-up local political organisation.



It might help your focus to colour-code the map. What information matters most to you? Can you classify and group different parts of your audience? Some examples that we have used include:

- |             |              |                   |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| ■ Active    | ■ Client     | ■ High priority   |
| ■ Potential | ■ Supplier   | ■ Medium priority |
| ■ Lapsed    | ■ Partner    | ■ Low priority    |
|             | ■ Competitor |                   |



## Identify the Relationships

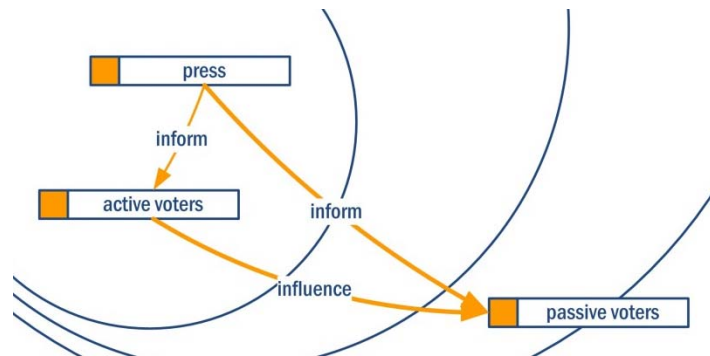
Now that you have a list of stakeholders in the right place, identifying the relationships that exist between them can significantly help you to understand your stakeholder ecosystem.

Primary relationships can usually be found to exist between stakeholders in neighbouring circles and within circles (especially the innermost “direct” group).

You can describe the relationship that exists (and the direction it flows) on the diagram if you wish (this will help you understand influence and the effect of communication and information across the eco-system).

Taking a portion of the example from earlier, we can add some relationships and describe the nature of those relationships too:

- Press *informs* Active voters
- Active voters *influence* Passive voters
- Press *informs* Passive voters



What we learn from this example is that two groups of people who are actively connected to what we are doing (i.e. in a direct relationship with our campaign or project), in this case the press and active voters, are able to connect to a remote group of stakeholders that we are unlikely to be able to exert any significance over, namely passive voters.



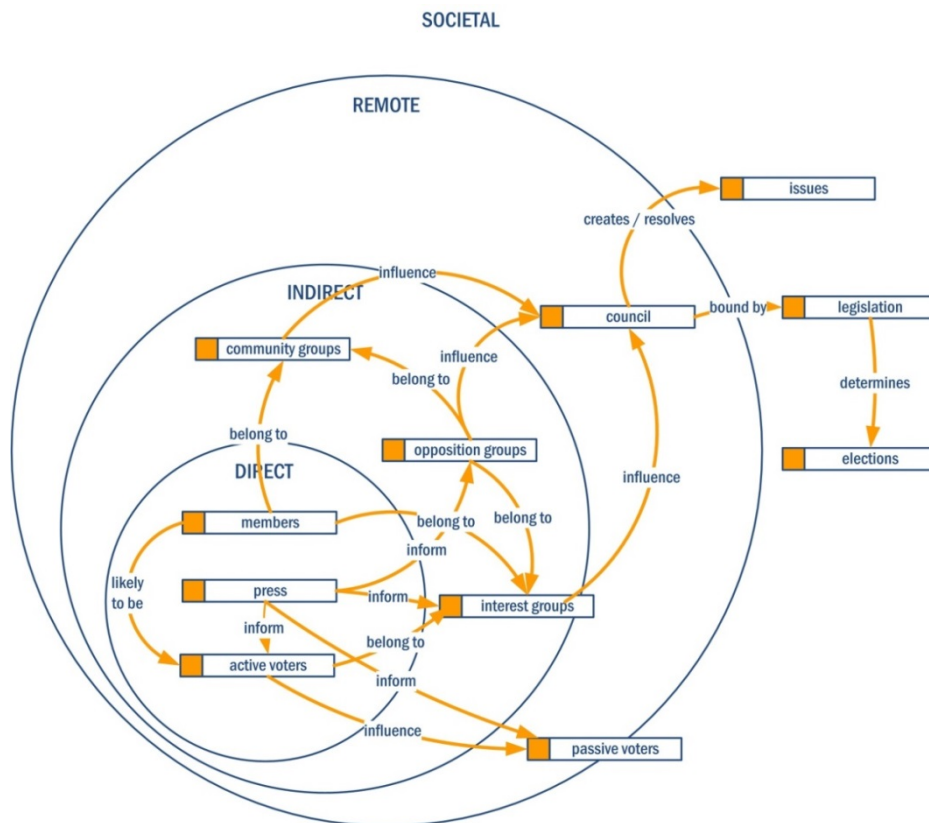
## Your Completed Audience Map

Once this session has been completed you will hopefully know who your stakeholders – your audience – are and how strongly they affect/influence or are affected/influenced by the project or campaign. You will also have gained some significant understanding of the key relationships that exist between stakeholders (and between you and the stakeholders).

The end-result of this process is a graphical representation of the stakeholder ecosystem in the form of an Audience Map.

Keep the chart, take a picture and, if you can, put it somewhere you and others will see it. Where the time allows, a reflective period can be really useful for helping you confirm what you've written, it helps you think about the relationships (not just who, but the nature of those relationships) and it acts as a visual trigger for your own thinking about you are going to engage with your audience.

Here's our earlier example again, this time with the relationships added in. This is your completed Audience Map. Remember this is not meant to be exhaustive or generic, it is intended to give your client, key stakeholders and the team a clear, specific and (most importantly) shared understanding of the project's stakeholders. This is useful to have before you start making assumptions about what it is that you're doing and the impact that it will have.



## Understand your Stakeholders

A visual representation of the project's stakeholders can be enough. If you want to drill down further to provide more information on stakeholders then a table of stakeholders is useful. This lets you transpose the information already gathered in terms of who they are and where they sit in relation to what it is you are doing. It then allows you to see clearly who they influence and are influenced by and to provide a definition of their role and potential impact in relation to the project/campaign. This example takes a sub-set of the Audience Map above by way of an example:

| <b>Stakeholder</b> | <b>Influences/<br/>Affects</b>                     | <b>Influenced/<br/>Affected by</b>        | <b>Description of role</b>  |
|--------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>DIRECT</b>      |  |   |   |
| Party members      | Other members<br>Active voters<br>Interest groups  | Active voters<br>Press<br>Interest groups | Party members are the key project workers for the campaign. At this level of granularity, it includes candidates. |
| Active voters      | Party members<br>Passive voters<br>Interest groups | Press<br>Party members                    | This describes the section of the community who are actively informed regarding local body politics.              |

You can see from this that relationships can exist one or both ways and that a single stakeholder can be both influenced and an influencer. Often you will see that complex circular relationships exist where influence moves outwards through the layers of the Audience Map only to return to the centre through the influence of other groups.

## Understand Influence and Value

Influence can be obvious or subtle but not understanding who influences who else in your eco-system risks focusing time and effort in the wrong place. Spend some time looking at the key stakeholders on your Audience Map (most likely those in your direct sphere but it could include others further out if they are critically important) and how they are related to you and to others.

Ask yourself:

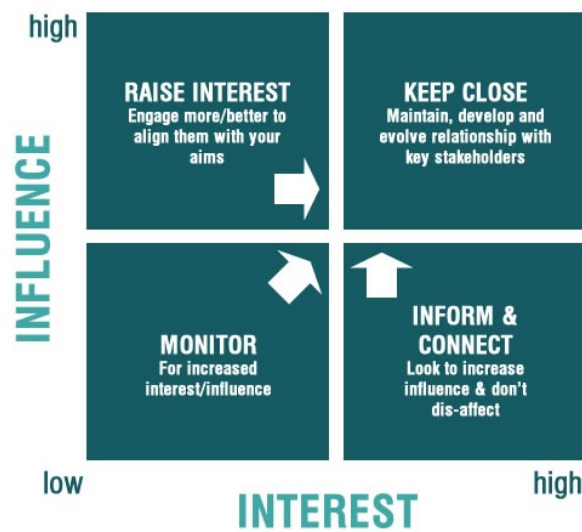
- Where do they get their information from?
- Who are they closely aligned with?
- Who do they trust?
- What is the value exchange between you and your key stakeholders?

You can describe these interfaces and interactions in a table:

| <b>Organisation</b> | <b>Influences</b>    | <b>Influenced</b>                                | <b>Value for them</b>                  | <b>Value for us</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------|--|--|---------------------|
| Interest Group A    | Party, Public, Media | Parliamentary party, International organisations | Support, credibility, policy expertise | Voice in council    |

## Shape your Message

You now have a good understanding of the people and organisations in your audience eco-system, how they relate to each other and their relationship with yourself and others. Specifically, you understand their distance from you and their level of influence and importance in the wider eco-system. It's now possible to define and categorise your audience.



This will help you to identify the people you want to target for engagement. Whether it's creating a call to action, influencing their thinking and decision making or targeting some kind of behaviour change, you can now focus on developing your campaign messages according to each stakeholder's level of interest and influence:

- **Monitor** those with low interest and low levels of influence.
- **Inform and connect** with those in your audience who have a high interest in what you are doing, but exhibit relatively low levels of influence. This group matter because they can be supported to become more influential (by you and others, particularly through social media) and they are also potentially able to become dis-engaged and dis-affected and therefore become negative influencers.
- **Maintain interest** from those who are key influencers but have lower levels of interest (examples include politicians and journalists). You need to ensure that this group is kept connected to your campaign. Consider too that they you want to encourage them to become more informed and

therefore more positively engaged but there is also a risk of them becoming dis-affected.

- **Keep close** to the key influencers with high levels of knowledge and expertise. These are the critical influencers in your network and must always be a focus of any communications strategy. It is too easy to focus on shifting other groups towards your position at the expense of maintaining the relationship and message with those already close.

It is critically important that your communications strategy incorporates **reflection and listening**, particularly with the latter two groups.

Here's an example of the influence and interest matrix using our earlier example. You'll see that one of these stakeholders exerts potentially strong negative influence – make sure to include any opposition within your ecosystem and be aware of its impact so you can develop counter-strategies):

|                  |             |                                   |   |
|------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| <b>INFLUENCE</b> | <b>High</b> | <b>Press<br/>Community groups</b> | <b>Members<br/>Interest groups<br/>Opposition (-ve)</b> |
|                  | <b>Low</b>  | <b>Passive voters<br/>Council</b> | <b>Active voters</b>                                    |
|                  |             | <b>Low</b>                        | <b>High</b>   |
|                  |             | <b>INTEREST</b>                   |   |

You can map the stakeholders you identify earlier across the four quadrants above and then ask these three questions:

- What do they think now?
- What do we want them to think?
- What do we want them to say when they talk about us?

| <b>Who</b> | <b>What they think</b>     | <b>We want them to think</b>   | <b>We want them to say</b>  | <b>What we have to do</b>  |
|------------|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Press      | No track record            | They might be new together but individually they're hugely experienced                                 | Experience comes together to bring a new refreshing face to local politics: Better together | Promote established candidates<br>Point to track record<br>Create inspiring electoral ticket     |
|            | Single issue party         | One issues might be a catalyst for formation but the track record goes right across all the key issues | Recognise all the important issues  | Ensure that policies are clearly promoted<br>Show range of previous successes                    |
|            | Not interested because new | They're Strong, serious contenders: a credible force   | An interesting and viable new force *who can win*   | Track record combined with strong local candidates and clear message.<br>Engage in public debate |

You now have a starting point (as is) and a tangible end point (where to). The challenge now is to create an action plan for each key stakeholder (or groups of stakeholders where this is appropriate – but remember that the broader the audience the more generic the message and you might lose some of the necessary nuancing in your message).

For each of your target audience, you can also consider:

- Their direct and indirect influencers (who do they listen to)
- Their values
- Potential triggers for change
- Favoured and appropriate methods and media for communication

## Tell me a Story

You know who matters, what they think and what you need to do to get them to support you (or to counter what they say if they are counter-positional). Now is the time to activate your campaign or communications strategy. One model we suggest for this is as simple as one, two, three:

- Message; Momentum; and Mass

It's rarely productive to simply argue that something is wrong. People want solutions, not more problems. So all that does is place you on one side of what is already likely to be a polarised debate. To overcome this we recommend a simple three-part story:

- Explain the problem your campaign or product will solve
- Make the story personal, write it in the first-person and make it compelling.
- Keep it relevant and be clear about what you want to happen.

In other words create an outcome focussed, human-level call to action! If you're a charity, chances are you're already good at this. Yet often this is exactly what our elected representatives are missing and need to hear. In a world of evidence-based policy, it's even more important to relate the campaign to something real and human because people will engage emotionally with this as well as logically with the underlying data. This is a key to turning advocacy into a compelling case.

A drop of water eventually becomes an ocean and the chances are that you are not alone. The next stage is to create momentum. Now you know who the key influencers are and you've worked out how to reach them, look for the network multipliers and ensure that you're not just one voice shouting in a crowd.

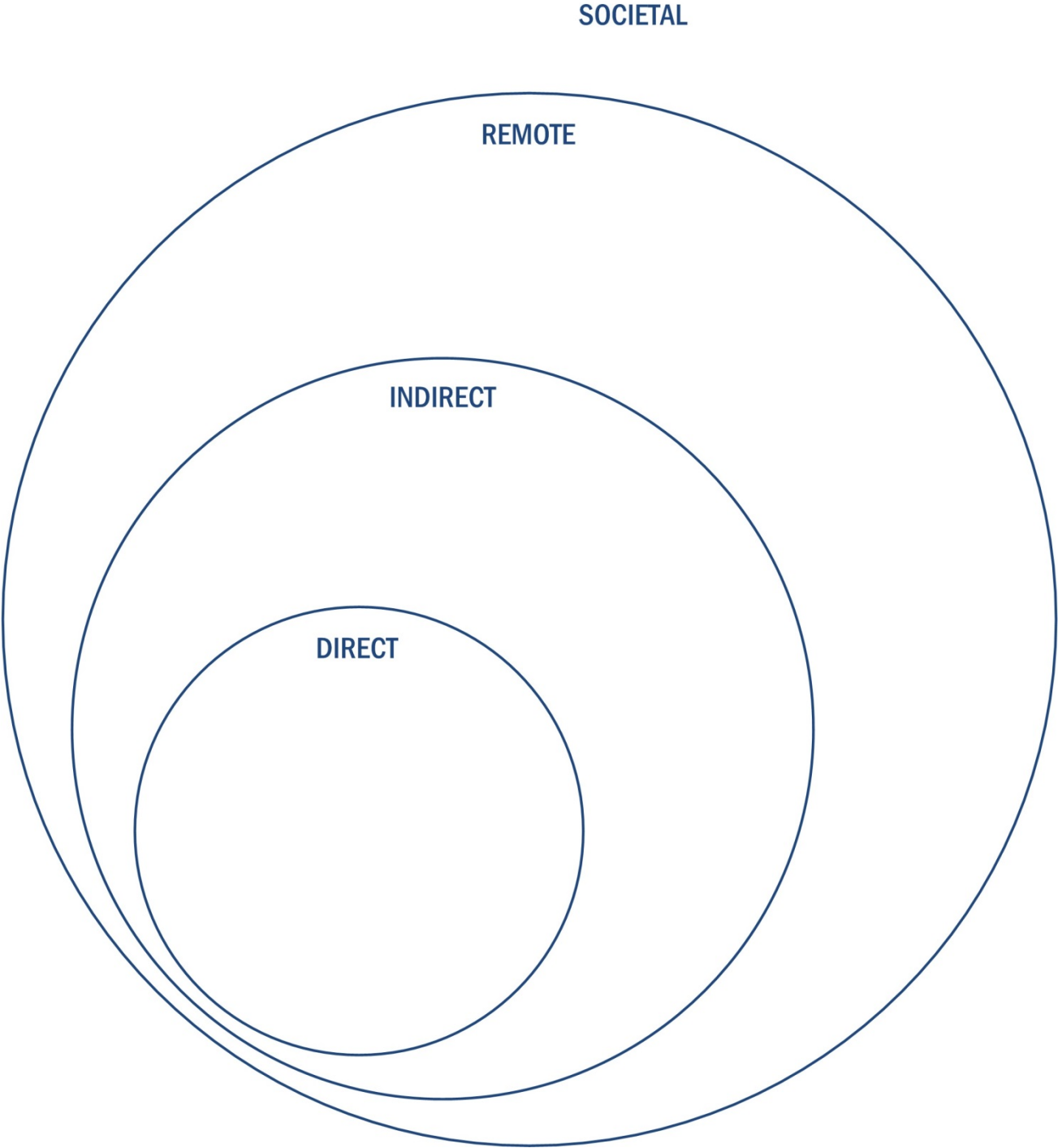
The third stage is to consider whether you need to create public mass. Some campaigns need mass public engagement, where online campaigning can significantly raise the attention around an issue. Others may need strategic partnership with one or two relevant organisations to add clout. You need to think hard around this, as there is no right answer and no checkbox answer. Sometimes both are needed. Either way, it pays to think open to collaboratively around campaigns, especially where others can bring something to unique the table, add credibility and help spread the message. Unusual partnerships can show strength and depth, both of which can be valued by policy makers and lawmakers.

There's power in these numbers. But once the campaign has got going it is all about getting in front of the people that matter – the decision-makers. By all

means use the mass-email technique to raise your profile and demonstrate support. But alone it's as likely to frustrate lawmakers as it is to engage them. Back up your story with policy by explaining what's happening, the impact if it happens and what should happen instead.



# Audience Map







# Influence and Interest Matrix

|           |      |          |      |
|-----------|------|----------|------|
| INFLUENCE | High |          |      |
|           | Low  |          |      |
|           |      | Low      | High |
|           |      | INTEREST |      |



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