

Ladders of engagement

Ladders of engagement

If you want to activate more people, you'll need to systematically offer the right people the right next step at the right time — a step that entices them to increase their time commitment. This way, you're offering people a ladder they can choose to climb, step by step. The steps shouldn't be too big to take. This is what we call a ladder of engagement.

- The ladder starts at the lowest rung with actions that most activists or potential activists are ready for at that moment. From there, it builds gradually towards actions that require greater commitment — and sometimes greater risk. Use these steps deliberately to grow both the quantity and quality of the people you are activating.
- An engagement ladder that runs in sync with your campaign ensures that each step feels timely and contributes to the collective impact you are trying to make.
- By introducing a ladder of engagement early, you can escalate at critical moments — for example, when negotiations or lobbying efforts stall — because you'll already have a reservoir of active members who are ready for higher commitment and higher risk. You will not need to ask your community to go from zero to a hundred all at once.



By giving clear names to the different levels of engagement within a fixed qualification system, your organization can plan and collaborate more effectively. It also helps you monitor where your supporters are on the ladder of engagement, and how many of the people you invited to take the next step actually did so, in other words, whether your offer was effective. This helps you learn what does and does not work for your audience.

And yes, you're working with people. And people do not fit neatly into boxes. A ladder of engagement is a tool, not a goal in itself. Some people will join your organization already on the highest rung. Others may feel most comfortable in the middle and have no desire to move up. And that's perfectly fine.

Below is a theoretical example of a ladder of engagement:

Observer – is not a member, but follows your organization in the media.

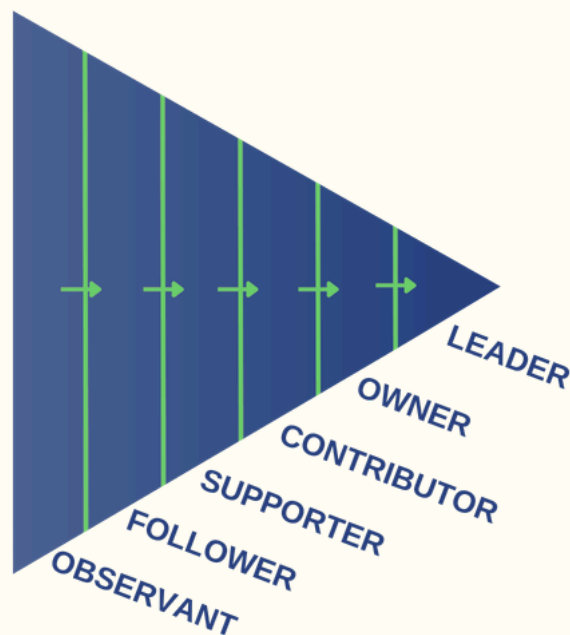
Follower – is subscribed to your newsletter or follows you on social media.

Supporter – is a member and/or signs petitions, shares social media content.

Contributor – is an active member who joins events and activities.

Owner – is an active member who takes on responsibilities or tasks.

Leader – leads a team of activists.



A ladder of engagement can also be used to set internal goals that ensure every project or campaign includes enough opportunities for members at every level. It also helps distribute the work associated with each rung of the ladder. For example, the lower rungs might be the responsibility of your communications team, while the “owners” and “leaders” may fall more within the domain of organizers.

Below are two more examples of what an engagement ladder can look like.

Example 1

Observer – is not yet a member, but hears about your organization and the local volunteer team through friends, neighbors, or colleagues and learns that they can join the WhatsApp group without any obligation.

Follower – is a member of the local team's WhatsApp broadcast channel or follows the organization on social media, where regular calls to become a member and get involved are shared.

Supporter – is a member and/or signs a petition from the local team, shares social media content, and is invited to attend a meeting.

Contributor – is an active member and participates in activities. During an event, they may be asked to take notes at the next meeting or bring snacks.

Owner – is an active member who takes on specific tasks, such as managing the WhatsApp channel, and is encouraged to lead a project or campaign.

Leader – leads the local team and maintains contact with the broader organization. Promising members are invited to take on more responsibility within the organization.



Example 2

After creating a campaign plan, a structure is set up to onboard activated people at every level of engagement. The better this is prepared, the smoother the machine runs, and the more effective it will be. The more you listen to members after the launch and adjust based on data, the stronger your campaign becomes. By setting quantifiable goals for each rung, you can measure what percentage of people take the next step up the ladder.

Observer – is not yet a member but follows the organization through media coverage. Every media story includes a clear message about how and why to get involved, and features voices of current members.

Follower – potential members are subscribed to the newsletter or follow the organization on social media. They are invited to sign a petition or sign up via a form.

Supporter – has just become a member and/or signs a petition, shares social media content, and receives a personal invitation via phone or email to attend a webinar.

Contributor – is an active member who joins a webinar and is asked during the session to sign up online for a door-to-door team.

Owner – is an active member of a local door-to-door team, and uses an app on their phone to track the results of conversations. At the door, they also ask people to sign a petition.

Leader – leads a local door-to-door team and serves as the link to the national campaign team.



We are Stroomversnellers

Stroomversnellers is a collective of experienced campaigners, organizers, facilitators, and trainers. We are all (or have been) active in environmental organizations, grassroots movements, trade unions, and anti-racism initiatives. Through trial and error, we've learned how to run effective campaigns, build organizations, and create real social change.

We're always learning and we love to share our knowledge and experience with others.

Because the world doesn't move in the right direction on its own, in fact, quite the opposite. A better society can only be built by many well-prepared people working together. That's why we support groups fighting for social and ecological justice with advice, strategy or brainstorm sessions, (action) trainings, and workshops. Together, we can grow, build power, and change the world.

Toolbox for Movements

This guide is part of our [Toolbox for Movements](#), a growing collection of short digital guides with essential knowledge on strategy, movement building, direct action, and organizing. A solid foundation for new activists, and a fresh perspective for experienced changemakers. You'll find all our published guides there as well.

We love learning too

So if you have ideas for improving this guide, or want to add your own experiences, let us know!

www.stroomversnellers.org

info@stroomversnellers.org

IG: [@stroomversnellers](#)

FB: [TrainerscollectiefStroomversnellers](#)

Bluesky: [@stroomversnellers.bsky.social](#)

Linkedin: [Stroomversnellers Trainers](#)

STROOMVERSNELLERS 

