

The Fawcett Society

Make Some Noise project

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the Fawcett Society's Make Some Noise project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by the Fawcett Society.

Introduction

The Fawcett Society was founded in 1866 to win votes for women, and now campaigns for equality between women and men. Political representation is a key part of their work, and over the last few years they have increasingly been researching and publishing on the subject of black and minority ethnic (BME) women. This project built upon that research to enable BME women to make the connection between politics and their everyday lives.

Aim

To use a combination of media campaigning in the run-up to the May 2006 local elections to encourage awareness of local democracy among women, and particularly BME women.

Funding

The project was awarded £29,250 and ran from February to July 2006.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were:

- to increase awareness and/or understanding of elections

and government in the UK among women and particularly BME women in targeted parts of the UK

- to use the May 2006 local elections as an opportunity to raise the profile of the importance of women's votes
- to use the May 2006 local elections as an opportunity to inform women, and particularly BME women, of the links between their daily lives and politics
- to encourage women, particularly BME women, as a consequence of the above, to use their vote in the May 2006 local elections
- to measure the effectiveness of the different communication channels used in this campaign to reach women and particularly BME women

How successful was the project?

There were a number of inter-related elements which comprised the four-month campaign. A media campaign encouraged coverage of the project, especially in local press, radio and media targeted

at BME women. A set of web pages branded 'Make Some Noise 2006' hosted within the Fawcett Society website included information on how to vote and how to ask candidates questions; ideas on how to 'make noise' in local media, to political parties, etc.; information on women in local government, and other information on the democratic process. A viral email campaign using an interactive quiz ('Noise-ometer') was used to attract visits to the 'Make Some Noise 2006' web pages. Finally, a 10-page booklet entitled *Women: Make Some Noise on May 4th*, giving information about local councils, the role of women in politics, and how to vote and get involved, was distributed through women's groups and community venues. A note in the booklet suggested that readers use the information to question local election candidates about their policies and those of their political parties.

The project was evaluated by an external evaluator using several methods, including telephone interviews, press cuttings, web site statistics and online surveys.

The majority of respondents to the online survey said that the website had increased their knowledge about local councils, made them more likely to vote and helped them to know how they can influence their local council.

The day before the viral email was sent, the website had 221 hits; the following day it had 2,930 hits. Even allowing for repeat visits and visits by staff, traffic was clearly greatly increased by the use of the email. Feedback regarding the booklet's usefulness in informing people about issues and how to get involved was almost unanimously positive, and showed that this was the preferred method of communication.

Good practice

- The mixture of methods of communication ensured that the message was received by a variety of people. Feedback showed that the balance was about right between hard copy and online material.
- The Fawcett Society is perceived as being an appropriate agency to produce and disseminate this sort of material, as there is a high level of trust in the organisation.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- The targeting of women who are not necessarily engaged with the political process was not entirely successful, in that at least half of all feedback respondents were already familiar with Fawcett. This may be distorted by the fact that the respondents were self-selecting, in that

'Fawcett-friendly' women would be more likely to take time to provide feedback. However, some said they would use the information to reach less-engaged people.

- Many respondents felt that more local statistics and information would have been useful, particularly in the context of local elections.
- The booklet was perceived to be the most trustworthy method of communication and was preferred over the website as it was easier to share with others and have on hand when talking to election candidates.

Further information

For further information about this project please contact:

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at www.electoralcommission.org.uk