



AN INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVISM AT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Level 1: Becoming an activist

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**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**





Women's rights activism, Morocco 2014. © Amnesty International

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

Before you read this guide we recommend you check out our guide on an [Introduction to Amnesty International and Human Rights](#).

On the same page you can sign up for a webinar where you'll find out everything you need to know to get more involved in the movement.

If you have any questions please get in touch with us at activism@amnesty.org.au.



Refugee rights activism, Australia 2019. © Amnesty International

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to an Introduction to Activism at Amnesty International Australia. In this module we want to give you an understanding of what activism involves and how it is central to our work. Importantly, we will show you that anyone can be an activist. It doesn't matter what experience, skills or background you have, you can still take part.

If you haven't seen the previous module on human rights and Amnesty, we recommend you read that first.

What is activism?

Activism is about taking action and advocating for change on an issue that is important to you. It's also about inspiring others to take action as well. An action is any activity that puts pressure on the people with the power to do the right thing on your issue. That pressure you create might be large or small, but when combined with everyone else's it can be enormous.

These actions take many forms and range in terms of complexity. It could be something as quick and easy as signing an online petition or communicating with a politician by letter or email. It's volunteering your time to ensure there is capacity to for deeper activism on the ground. It might be educating other people in the community on an issue and encouraging them to take action. It could be meeting with those in power face to face to tell them what needs to change. It's helping to grow a movement to increase power and impact. But it's also about doing it in a way that works for you based on your own capacity and what you're comfortable with doing. Only you can define your own activism and role as an activist.



Handing over petitions, Australia 2019. © Amnesty International

But, before we can reach the stage where we each take action, we first have to have a plan. We call this plan a campaign strategy, it's a road map to get us to where we need to go. The first step is to identify what the issue is through our research. Once we have a clearer idea of what the actual problem is, we know what we need to change. This means we now know what our ultimate goal is.

We then identify who in power has responsibility for making this change. We inform them that we know about the problem and try to influence them to make change. Often these decision makers tend to be reluctant to champion change for a variety of reasons. For example, public perception is a primary concern of theirs. By taking a supportive stance in favour of change they could risk losing their position of power. But, they may also have a fundamental opposition to the changes we are proposing.

It's important to remember that these decision makers are not innocent bystanders. If they show apathy, reluctance or opposition to change then they allow the problem to continue. Even if they say they are for the change, but don't actually do anything. They are still responsible for these human rights abuses through inaction.

So, what will motivate decision makers to take notice and be pressured to do the right thing? We have to show that a significant section of the public supports this change. Also that we will keep campaigning until the change happens. Our resolve has to be stronger than theirs until it reaches a stage where they have no choice but to act.

This is where activism comes in. Through our strategy we work out what activities we need to create the pressure. It's important that it comes from a variety of sources so that everywhere they turn they encounter it. The speed in which change comes varies. But it does tend to take years of sustained campaigning and activism before we win.

Organising and Mobilising

Modern activism has two primary approaches, organising and mobilising. But both used in combination are integral to a successful activism strategy.

Organising is about increasing our power by identifying, developing and empowering activist leaders. By doing this we can distribute power and leadership within our movement. Mobilising is about demonstrating sizable power through mass action and engagement.

To go into a bit more detail, here is a side by side comparison of organising and mobilising.

	Organising	Mobilising
Overall goal	Increasing people's capacity to act.	Maximising number of actions taken.
Strategy for growth and recruitment	Growing leadership in the movement by empowering activists that have the capacity to lead.	Growing the movement by taking in as many people as possible and inspiring them to take action on an issue.
Structure of movement	Distributed responsibility, a snowflake model.	Centralised hierarchy, a top down model.
Results	Depth of support, capacity & skill of movement.	Breadth of support, size of movement.

In practice it generally looks like the following:

Amnesty International develops a multi year plan on a particular issue. For example, we have a campaign to expand Australia's community sponsorship program. We identified it as one of many ways we can address the global refugee crisis. With this strategy we start by launching an online petition. This is to garner as much support as possible with a simple action. It's also to identify which of our supporters are willing to work on the campaign. This campaign's petition called on the government to increase the intake of refugees. This is the first stage of enacting our mobilising plan.

At the same time we inspire activist leaders to engage with the campaign. These leaders start building up support for the campaign in their communities. They coordinate different activities to achieve this purpose. They sustain these activities over a long period of time to keep pressure on the target. In this campaign we encourage leaders around the country to gain local allies. This was to increase their power and visibility in the community. They used this power to lobby their local council to sign onto the campaign. This showed the federal government that communities around the country want this change. These activities form part of our organising plan.

Then there are key moments where it's vital we show our size and power. This is when ramp up our mobilisation activities. There might be a moment where the issue is dominant in the media or leaders are meeting to discuss the issue. These provide an excellent opportunity to show the community cares en masse. We'll ask supporters to all act at the same time through a variety of online and real world activities. The aim of this is to push the campaign to a higher level of perception and to create wider support for change. They're also moments where the decision makers can't feign ignorance to the issue. We keep this cycle going until we win.

Of course a lot needs to happen to gain that kind of victory. We need the right campaign strategy. One which inspires our movement to get involved. We need to build mass support around the issue. We need people power to create the pressure. We need the resilience and patience to keep the campaign alive. So it has to be a campaign that resonates with the public or can change public opinion.

Activism at Amnesty International Australia

There are other elements to activism that are more specific to Amnesty International. Let's start with our People Powered operating model. This model determines what is important to us and how we go about doing it in an effective way. We have to be sure that any decision we make about how we function fits within this model

Through this model we connect with people by telling compelling stories. We invite them to be part of a community of dedicated Amnesty supporters. We give our leaders agency to create and amplify their own power.

By doing this we ensure impact which is at the centre of our work, because are here to protect and defend more lives.

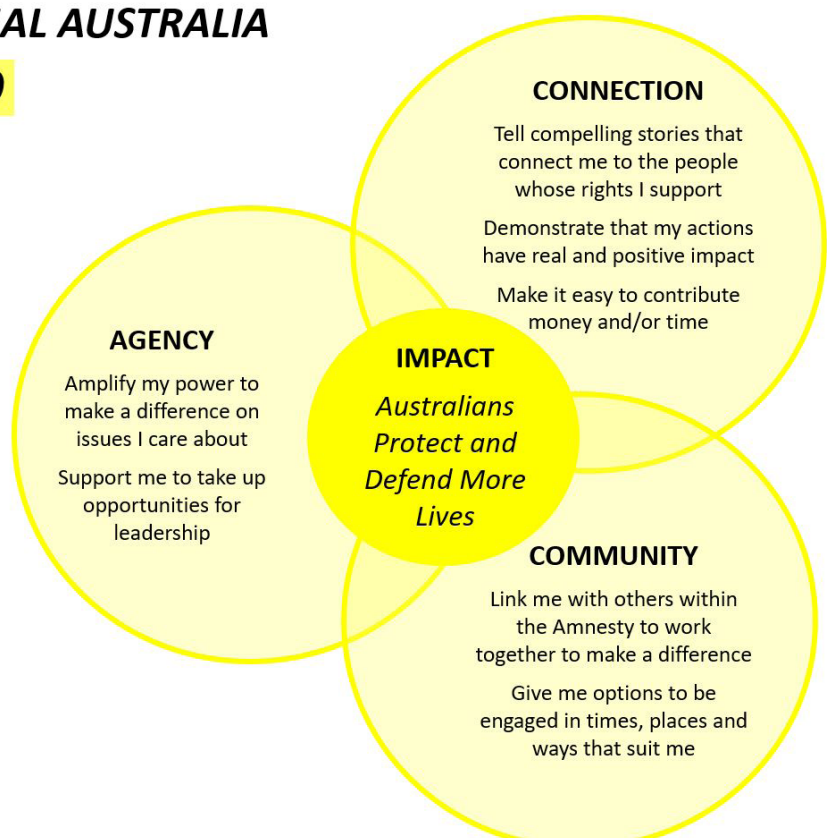
This is what it looks like in effect.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

PEOPLE POWERED

Amnesty International Australia protects and defends more lives by being the place Australians can most effectively:

- Make a **connection** with their human rights values
- Be part of a **community** working towards a better world, and
- **Amplify** their power to make positive change.



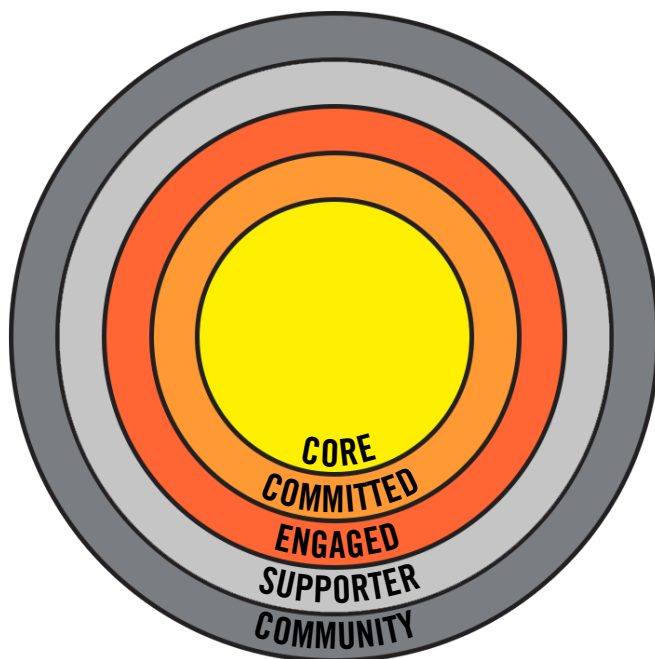
Activist journey & circles of commitment

Another aspect of our model is the activist journey. It's for people to have that connection, community and agency in a more consistent way. The journey begins from the moment someone first becomes an activist. From there it depends on what steps the activist wants to take. But it can continue until the point they become leaders in our movement. Each step needs the right amount of support, resources and development opportunities. But it also needs to be flexible as every activist's journey is a bit different.

For example, what a new activist needs is completely different to that of a leader. Some keen activists will race through the journey to become a leader in a short time. Others will stay at whichever level suits them. Some will be involved for many years continuously, others for short periods intermittently. So, we have to tailor the way we engage with and support different activists. It's based on their individual interest, experience and capacity.

The way we separate this journey is based around different levels of engagement with Amnesty. We call this the circles of commitment. It identifies five different levels based on how involved someone is with our movement. Here is a basic overview of those different levels.

CIRCLES OF COMMITMENT



COMMUNITY: People that do not have any involvement with Amnesty International.

SUPPORTER: People that have taken some form of action with Amnesty e.g. signed an online action, liked our Facebook page or added themselves to our mailing list.

ENGAGED: People who are involved as activists in a supportive capacity. They support leaders and staff by volunteering to help with public activities or behind the scenes.

COMMITTED: People that provide regular high level support or coordinate activities themselves. They have usually been in the movement for a while and have some form of ongoing responsibility.

CORE: People that lead our movement and do a wide range of high level activities. These include developing plans & strategies. They also coordinate, mentor and develop other activists.

If you have [expressed interest in becoming an activist](#) you are at the beginning of the journey. We would consider you to moving from the Supporter to the Engaged level. We want to give you a better idea of what may lie ahead for you if you decide to get more involved.

What happens next depends on what you'd like to do. You could focus on developing more skills as an activist. Getting some experience supporting activities in the community or at our action centres. You could choose a campaign you'd like to focus on and figure out how you'd like to engage with it. If you'd like to meet some other activists we can put you in touch with them. Whether you want to take things slow or jump right in we can help you achieve that. We value all contributions, large or small. It all helps protect human rights.

What's next?

As a new activist we want to ensure that you feel confident and informed before you get more involved. If you haven't signed up to be an activist yet, you can do so here. We would also encourage you to do some of the following activities to get you started.

Stay up to date with the latest campaign updates, activism opportunities and local events via our website or on social media.

www.amnesty.org.au



www.facebook.com/AmnestyOz



www.twitter.com/amnestyOz



www.instagram.com/amnestyaustralia/

Become a member of Amnesty International so you can have a voice in determining Amnesty's direction. For a small, once-yearly fee of \$22, you can stand for board positions, join committees, and vote on important resolutions. You can even feed into Amnesty's global decision-making meetings.

<http://action.amnesty.org.au/membership/>

Sign up to give a once off or regular donation. Amnesty doesn't accept funding from governments, political organisations or companies. We only rely on people like you. This financial independence means we're free to campaign with objectivity and impartiality and to defend human rights worldwide.

<https://action.amnesty.org.au/donate/>

Take part in our modules on fundamental activist skills. You can learn how to talk to people about campaigns, how to develop a self care plan, what it takes to think strategically and a lot more. Each one of these modules comes with suggestions for real life experience so you can ease your way into becoming an activist at your own pace.

<https://www.amnesty.org.au/skill-up/>

Check out the latest information on our campaigns. Each campaign page has research, online petitions and activist resources you can use. Download one of our activist toolkits and think about how you could take action in the community. Share our content with people you know to encourage them to take action as well.

<https://www.amnesty.org.au/campaigns/>

Thank you for reading through our introduction to activism at Amnesty International. We hope that has given you all the information you need to be able to join us in holding the powerful to account. There are a lot of benefits to becoming an activist as part of our movement. Amnesty has a lot experience campaigning for human rights and working with activists. We provide a lot of resources, development opportunities and support as well. We have a global community of other activists you can work with to know that you are never alone. We very much look forward to working with you.

If you have any questions you can get in touch with us at activism@amnesty.org.au. **Thank you for your time!**