Internet Access for All – Update and tactics menu for supporters

The pace of change since our campaign was launched a few weeks ago has been breath-taking. While the Covid-19 Pandemic continues to cause infection, hardship and confusion, companies have opened data caps for selective groups and Dáil Éireann and The Stormont Assembly have responded with direct investment in tech support. Although limited in scale and reach, this demonstrates clearly that change is possible.

In the absence of support, communities are mobilising in unprecedented ways to fill the gaps with limited resources. However, it is clear from numerous accounts during our discussions that much more is necessary and possible to lift the barriers to internet access and tackle the hardships people face.

Global scrutiny of the digital divide and its impact in the era of Covid-19 has grown steadily. Following school closures, research by the Sutton Trust and the Institute for Fiscal Studies, amongst others, has revealed significant gaps in access, engagement and projected outcomes between less well-off students and more affluent ones. Open Global Rights have highlighted the digital divide as well as positive examples of efforts to bridge it, from countries as diverse as Finland and Mexico. Media outlets around the world continue to report on innovative ways different communities are overcoming the digital barriers facing them.

The menu of ideas and tactics developed by participants in our recent strategy sessions are below and fall into 4 categories:
- Building pressure on telecom providers
- Mobilising support
- Telling the story
- Developing alternatives

We hope you can progress them in your own communities, through your networks and spheres of influence.

Click here to feedback your thoughts on what tactics we should use next.

Click here to join our next meeting (Tuesday 16th June at 11am) to discuss the results and progress.

Building Pressure on telecoms providers.

Summary - To date Open Reach and BT have responded. Click here to view their responses in full. They have not responded positively to the campaign's proposals to lift data caps or open Wi-Fi hotspots. It is evident that, by and large, they do not feel the need to engage with our campaign despite the issues faced by the communities we support. We need to be seen clearly and heard loudly by being relevant to things that matter to them: their profits, their PR profile, their shareholders, their customers, their competitors, their regulators and the state bodies which legislate for their business.

Tactic 1: 'Pledge to Cancel' contracts with select telecoms companies
Lobby public, private and charitable organisations – as well as communities – to strategically cancel contracts with telecoms companies who are not opening hotspots and lifting data caps.

Action: Getting people to individually cancel is difficult, so we opt for a collective 'Pledge to Cancel' similar to the Boycott Amazon Prime campaign. People sign the Pledge. Once a certain number have signed the campaign seeks publicity on the back of the pledges. Every pledge can be automatically announced from signatories own social media accounts and directed at the telecom company.

Tactic 2: Expose who benefits
Carry out a range of public activities which demonstrate how lucrative telecoms companies are, and how much their profit is dependent on the public.

Action: Follow the money. Use population and internet usage statistics to estimate the amounts of money being paid daily/weekly/monthly/annually by communities to telecoms companies. Identify how (and by how much) telecoms companies have benefited from government grants and subsidies (public money). Find out how much money CEOs are paid. Look into if/how telecoms companies have benefited from the pandemic. Release this information publicly and to campaign partners to publish it widely.

Tactic 3: Open call for meeting between telecoms providers and Internet for All Coalition
Coalition convenes an online meeting inviting the telecoms companies to attend and respond to campaign proposals.

Action: Use the meeting to 'speak truth to power' - an opportunity to put on record the stories coalition partners have collected about people being left without access and the impact of this. We ask for political parties and statutory commissions (human rights, equality, children's, etc.) to officially observe the meeting. If the companies do not come to the meeting, we use it to show their lack of accountability and call for political action.

Tactic 4: Complaints/Litigation
Coalition partners collectively send a letter of complaint to regulators and/or statutory commissions to initiate investigations and generate publicity.

Action: We identify where the providers are either breaching legislation or causing harm – which falls within the remit of the commissions and can trigger their intervention. A legal case would require an applicant who is impacted or an organisation to take the case at risk of costs, however it may be a way to build pressure for change from telecoms companies and government.

Cross-cutting Tactic: Use of Media
Media outlets across the island (print, radio, tv) are engaged when one of the above tactics kicks off in order to raise publicity and reach out to the public.

Action: Coalition partners develop a range of spokespeople from different sectors/interests in society willing to provide interviews/quotes to the media.

Mobilising Support

Summary: Over 200 organisations signed the initial letter to telecoms companies including high profile individuals in sports and arts. Since then hundreds more have endorsed the campaign including representatives of various political parties. Many have used their online platforms to promote the campaign. Others have successfully used influence with political parties and other organisations to seek endorsement of the campaign. The campaign has been approached by people wanting to tell their personal story or the story of how their organisation is supporting people.

Tactic 1: Share the campaign and ask for support
Use social media platforms to ask family, friends, colleagues, political parties, front line workers to sign the petition and post online to encourage others to do the same. Example: our online petition to the telecoms companies.

Action: Use our existing websites, emails, messaging apps to promote the petition (or any other campaign 'sign-up' actions such as the 'Pledge to Cancel' tactic).

Tactic 2: Mobilising online influencers to action
Ask celebrities and people of influence across the island and internationally to support the campaign. Reach out to celebrities who work in advertising for the telecoms companies.

Action: Draw up a list of individuals who coalition partners have a relationship with. Develop standard emails/letters requesting support which can be tailored by the different organisations. Give it a certain amount of time and see how many sign up for support. Announce the celebrity endorsements one a day to build up momentum and attract attention.

Tactic 3. Engage elected representatives
A number of elected representatives from various political parties have endorsed the campaign by signing the petition and sharing online with their supporters.

Action: Draw up a list of all elected representatives (and parties) and actions they can take (public statement, writing to telecoms companies, promoting petitions, passing motions in Councils/Dáil Eireann/Stormont or at party conferences, etc). Decide which parties or elected representatives are most likely to provide a favourable response – and approach them. Publish the results and updates.

Telling the story

Summary: Every day we hear accounts of people left without internet access including older people with no tech, broadband or skills, young people in education or care without access and refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups with limited or no income. However, most people believe that internet access is available for everyone and almost all government support has been moved online including benefits, employment, advice, medical support etc. Using what we know we can highlight the story of those who are left behind and influence private companies and political decision makers. Many individuals are doing this every day already - directly telling their story via social media platforms to the telecoms companies – Example: Replies to Virgin Media twitter account.

Tactic 1: Get the stories out

SOS is our new platform to share the experience of people left behind during the Covid-19 Emergency and take supportive action.

We have captured the personal testimonies of people in our network and are producing them in the following ways:

- Teachers and Pupils in communities facing poverty
- Syrian Refugees
- Renters in private landlord accommodation
- The story of the campaign – video
- Rural Communities

Action: Partners write up case studies of different people/groups they work with who are without internet access. We work to profile these using similar methods to PPR's case studies or new ones.

Tactic 2: Use the arts
Working with artists to tell the human stories in an engaging way is critical.

Action: Partners form a sub-group to engage directly with artists. Approach actors and artists and to work on ideas to turn the story's we hear into creative pieces - scripts, artwork, theatre, film, music, street art.

Tactic 3: Interrupt Telecoms Social Media feeds
Speak truth directly to power by interrupting the Twitter/Facebook profiles of telecoms companies with posts of our own.

Action: Partners develop a strategy (choose a company, theme, date, etc) to 'hijack' the social media accounts of major telecoms companies and post content which supports the campaign directly on their feeds.
Example: https://twitter.com/eir/status/1256508731870679042

Developing Alternatives

Summary: In the absence of support from telecoms companies or state authorities, communities are mobilising to fill the void, gathering up old and new tech to share with those who do not have it, paying for and sharing data and providing offline support and training to those who cannot access the internet.

PPR have launched an **online support map** to profile the great work groups are doing. You can see what support is available near you and add your group by emailing a short explanation of what you are doing to info@pprproject.org

Tactic 1: Supply tech directly
This would involve either a tactic to embarrass the state and private companies (therefore time-bound) or a broader strategy to actually try to meet people's needs through community distribution.

Actions: Partners develop a household survey which assess tech needs. This is completed online/with devices where possible, phone or social distancing contact. Partners use their own networks to surveys groups, streets, organisations, family members, etc. At the same time, we either identify organisations already providing donated tech and seek to support them, or use our own networks to recruit organisations willing to donate new/used tech. This would be distributed according to the survey.

Tactic 2: Activate the copper wire phone-line networks
Every home with a phone has copper wire internet access available – low quality but a basic minimum. The power is with the companies to switch this on but it would not cause a dent in profits.

Actions: Further explore if this is a possibility/feasible answer to minimum access.

Tactic 3: Wireless Community Networks
Communities in the USA and Europe have started to develop Wireless Community Projects which provide free wireless access points around communities:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wireless_community_network
https://www.netcommons.eu/sites/default/files/telecom-reclaimed-web-single-page.pdf
https://www.nycmesh.net/blog/how/

Actions: Set up a webinar with residents from these communities to see their projects and what resources/effort is involved.

Please be sure to give us your feedback on this document by going to our online survey.

Please also book for our next strategy session at 11am on Tuesday 16 June.