

Learning from the 2018 **Together for Yes** *Campaign*



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Foreword

Repealing the 8th Amendment was a momentous achievement for women's rights in Ireland. The Together for Yes Campaign contributed significantly to achieving this change and to ensuring that 1.4 million people voted Yes on May 25th in 2018.

As the three Directors of TFY we believe that sharing the learning of the TFY campaign is an important part of its legacy. There were many aspects to the TFY campaign, involving thousands of women and men throughout the country all giving their expertise, commitment and passion to finally removing the constitutional block on abortion in Ireland. Bringing forward what we have learned is an important record of the campaign, particularly as we are very aware in Ireland that our learned history has not fully recorded the achievements by women for women's rights, freedom and liberation.

We decided to commission this Review to gather the learning from everyone who wished to contribute, through surveys, interviews and focus groups. This Review presents the insights and learning and highlights the significant milestones of the campaign. We are very aware that people may have their own insights and learning points additional to what is described in this Review and we hope that this Review will generate the conversation and add value to activism for future campaigning.

This Review highlights the various stages of the TFY campaign and discusses the strategies, activities and resources that were necessary to build a national civil society referendum campaign. The Review clearly shows that in a referendum not all outcomes can be planned for, the unexpected happens, but the dynamic nature of TFY enabled us to be responsive and flexible and primarily to always stay focused on the single aim to repeal the 8th Amendment.

We hope this Review of TFY can be a useful resource for those embarking on new campaigns for social change in Ireland. It benefits us all to openly share our learning so that we can build on the achievements of TFY to mobilise and build solidarity for further change for women and Irish society.

We are very aware, as are all activists for social change, that no two campaigns are the same and there is no one ideal model for campaigning. Every campaign brings its own challenges, obstacles, opportunities and organisational and individual dynamics. Therefore the learning and conclusions of this Review spring directly from the experiences of TFY which we see as adding to the diverse material that has been built in Ireland from previous national campaigns.

During the referendum campaign and since the Repeal of the 8th, as Directors we are very aware of the continuing international focus and interest generated by the campaign. As women's organisations throughout the world continue to struggle and campaign for abortion, we can learn from each other to keep fighting to advance women's reproductive rights.

We wish to acknowledge the immense work of Michael Barron who carried out the research and compiled this Review. We are sincerely appreciative of his expertise and approach to the significant task of distilling a vast range of information and perspectives. We want to sincerely thank all who participated in the Review and generously gave their time to contribute their views and perspectives. We particularly thank the TFY team and the hundreds of volunteers across the country who made the TFY campaign such a historic victory for women's reproductive rights.

Grainne Griffin, Orla O'Connor, Ailbhe Smyth

Co-Directors, Together for Yes



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might need your Yes.

25 May
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Executive
Summary

PART 1: Introduction

The unequivocal result of the May 2018 constitutional referendum that allowed for the legal provision of abortion services in Ireland – 66.4% to 33.6% in favour – demonstrated a seismic shift in the struggle between the forces of religious, moral and cultural conservatism and those of social liberalism in public policy. Together for Yes was the alliance of leading Irish feminist and pro-choice organisations that came together early in 2018 to campaign for repeal of the Eighth Amendment from the Irish Constitution. Together for Yes commissioned this report to capture some of the learning gleaned in the course of a fast-paced campaign involving many dedicated individuals and diverse organisations around the country.

This report is structured to reflect on the experience of individuals involved in Together for Yes, so as to make the information useful for future social change campaigns in Ireland or internationally. It draws on interviews with central actors in the campaign, a series of three focus groups, and an online survey of 351 active campaigners from all around Ireland. The report is not an evaluation of the campaign, rather it focuses on what can be learnt from its challenges and successes.

Part 2 of the report focusses on the context and formation of the Together for Yes campaign; Part 3 examines the key structural and operational elements of the campaign. Part 4 provides an overview of useful learning.

PART 2: Forming a Campaign

Throughout the interviews, focus groups and survey carried out for this report, respondents repeatedly focused on the historical context of religious and patriarchal power in Ireland, particularly in relation to public health policy. Only in 1972 was the “special recognition” afforded to the Catholic Church removed from the Constitution (5th Amendment). The 1983 Eighth Amendment recognised the equal right to life of a pregnant woman – ‘the mother’ – and the life of her developing foetus – ‘the unborn’ (66.9% in favour). In 1992 a triple referendum was held on the right to travel for abortion (passed), the right to information on abortion (passed), and on the exclusion of the risk of suicide as grounds for abortion (failed). In 2002, the electorate was asked again if it wished to exclude the risk of suicide as grounds for abortion and it was again rejected.

The oppressive effects of the Eighth Amendment resulted in private turmoil and distress, with women travelling for abortion abroad in their thousands every year, in the most demeaning and difficult circumstances, typically in deepest secrecy. A number of high-profile cases, including the cases of Miss C case (1997) and Miss D (2007) as well as the 2010 judgement of the European Court of Human Rights in *A, B, and C v Ireland* meant the issue continued to have

wide public prominence. In 2012, the tragic death in October 2012 of Savita Halappanavar¹ was a tipping point galvanising the pro-choice movement into concerted action to build alliances and an organisational coalition (the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment), work on strategic issue-definition, develop public education and awareness-raising, and undertake intensive political lobbying and wide mobilisation. Importantly, during this period many advocacy organisations brought the government's inaction on the abortion issue to the attention of international bodies, including the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

In the run up to the 2016 General Election, consideration of a 'repeal' referendum was included in most of the political parties' manifestos. The newly-formed minority government set up a Citizens' Assembly² to consider a number of issues, include repeal of the Eighth Amendment. In April 2017, the Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of the holding of a referendum on the 8th Amendment and made a suite of markedly progressive recommendations on the terms of abortion legislation in the event of the electorate voting for repeal. These recommendations were referred to a joint parliamentary committee. The committee supported the Citizens' Assembly recommendation that a referendum be held, and largely upheld its proposals for progressive legislation to allow for abortion in Ireland.

Three of the key organisations advocating for women's choice throughout this period were the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment and the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi). Following intensive negotiations these three agreed to form Together for Yes, which became the central campaign organisation advocating for a Yes vote in the referendum which government had by then called for May 2018.

It was agreed that the campaign would comprise an Executive which the Irish Family Planning Association was also invited to join. Three campaign co-Directors were nominated (from ARC, the NWCi and the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment). A Campaign Manager was appointed, along with a Communications Manager, and seven work streams, or teams, were set up, each headed by a Team Lead. In early-January 2018, the name 'Together for Yes' was agreed upon as reflecting an inclusive broad-based national campaign that stood 'for' positive change rather than 'against' the past.

1 Savita Halappanavar died of sepsis in an Irish hospital in 2012 having been refused a termination of her pregnancy during an inevitable miscarriage because a foetal heartbeat was still detected.

2 The Citizens' Assembly established in 2016 was composed of 99 randomly selected citizens and was chaired by a former justice of the Supreme Court.

PART 3: Strategy, Process, Tactics

Research, Messaging and Strategy

The findings of research commissioned by the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment in collaboration with key member organisations in the years leading up to the actual Together for Yes campaign from 2016 were to prove fundamental to the campaign's success in shaping strategy, developing messaging, and strengthening campaign unity.

Focus group research conducted in 2016, 2017 and again in 2018 revealed that the public felt that they had been excluded by a polarised, ugly debate that had been going on in Ireland for decades. People felt that there was no room for moderate voices or for those who could see both sides of the argument. The focus groups found that people actively welcomed the opportunity to talk in a listening environment, and nuanced insights into attitudes to abortion emerged as a result. Many were troubled by the status quo, but cautious and wary of change; they wanted 'reasonable' dialogue to explore the issues; they regarded experienced medical professionals and women who had had abortions as the people they wanted to hear from. They saw politicians 'sitting on the fence' and thought that Catholic Church views would be predictably extreme and absolute in their rejection of abortion in any circumstances or for any reason.

In 2017, building on the focus group research findings, the National Women's Council launched their 'Every Woman' campaign for women's lifelong, reproductive healthcare. This confirmed the value and importance of public non-combative, explorative and dialogic spaces to listen and engage with various viewpoints and concerns. Every Woman provided a model of campaign communications that was influential in crafting campaign tone and messaging.

The value of understanding and respecting the electorate was a core principle for the Together for Yes campaign. The public understood the need for the provision of abortion in Ireland when they saw the harms to women that resulted from the denial of care and when they thought about abortion first and foremost as a personal need rather than a choice.

The key messaging principles underpinning campaign strategy were developed from this understanding. These were the 'three C's' of: Care, Compassion, and Change.

These messages underpinned a larger three-pronged strategy. Firstly, setting the tone as informative, reasoned, calm, and non-confrontational to assure a cautious public that the campaign would not engage in the kind of bitter and divisive debate the public was used to. Secondly, to centre abortion as a necessary part of women's healthcare. Lastly, to shift the traditional emphasis of the debate from 'choice' to 'needs'; from 'rights' to 'healthcare', and from judgement to empathy and compassion.

The operational plan for the campaign across the 68 days from the date of the referendum announcement (8th March 2018) to the date of the vote (25th May 2018) had three main phases:

1. Inform and Engage (first four weeks)
2. Persuade and Motivate (six 'middle' weeks)
3. Get the vote out (final 10 days).

The campaign teams worked together to coordinated targets and timelines, sharing information, experiences and strategic learning.

Evidence & Data

To support the strategy described, the Together for Yes campaign, set about building an evidence-based campaign, relying primarily on case studies demonstrating the harms of the Eighth Amendment and on medical expertise. Having decided to avoid being drawn into polarising debates with the opposition, the campaign relied on legal, medical and technical experts to devise appropriate, evidence-driven responses and rebuttals for media work and to support canvassers. Lawyers for Choice and Lawyers for Repeal were both significant supports to this aim, as were the IFPA, medics and seasoned campaigners on the Together for Yes team.

When talking about the personal health aspects of abortion, doctors and other health professionals were trusted spokespeople who could communicate complex medical issues to the general public. Doctors for Choice was an important vehicle for articulation and all-important alliance-building within the medical profession.

Placing a central focus on the experiences and needs of those most affected by the issues underpinned the Together for Yes campaign: the immediacy and authenticity of personal stories, rather than theoretical or abstract argument, were essential to grounding the campaign in the lives of ordinary people. The decision to focus on personal experiences proved to be absolutely correct: in a national referendum exit poll 'personal stories in the media' emerged as the most influential factor in persuading voters. An initiative that proved to be crucial to the campaign, the 'Storylab', was established to manage the sensitive issue of personal testimony and to prepare, support and protect the individual women and couples who volunteered to tell their stories during the campaign.

Communications

Within the operational phases of the campaign strategy across 68 days, the two key targets of the communications plan were the 'middle ground', who needed reminding of the importance of the issue, and Repeal supporters whose energy and activism the campaign needed to support and encourage. Both, as focus group research had demonstrated, needed to be approached in a reasonable and

moderate tone. Through a process of continuous review the campaign prepared spokespeople (health professional, and women and couples who had personal experience of abortion) for media work, including debates, print, public, and social media, at both national and local levels. A nation-wide Yes bus tour in the later stages of the campaign did significant work in amplifying local voices. The Storylab initiative mentioned above was a powerful source for personal testimonies. Crucial lessons were learned on how to establish credibility, manage the media lens, hold the focus on message priorities, as well as the scope of social media efficacy and effective targeting and continuity.

Mobilisation

Together For Yes focused specifically on both voter engagement and on mobilising campaign support across the country as already described in three main phases:

1. Inform and Engage (first four weeks)
2. Persuade and Motivate (six 'middle' weeks)
3. Get the Vote Out (final 10 days).

With support from the central campaign office in Dublin, local organisers around the country organised local meetings, media, door-to-door canvassing, local events and street stalls, or organised other high-visibility actions, such as placing Yes banners at roundabouts and bridges, amongst many other activities.

A canvassing team tracked data generated from canvas returns and created three effective campaign resources: the Canvas Together tool, the Find My Canvas platform, and a dedicated hub for Doctors for Choice and Lawyers for Repeal.

Coherence and coordination were key to the mobilisation campaign, along with as much forward planning as possible. Effective communication between HQ in Dublin and the rapidly growing number and size of local groups was challenging, but vital to mobilising people and resources, harnessing energy and commitment, and ensuring a collective, 'joined up' approach to campaigning. Allocating high value and as much in the way of resources as possible to on-the-ground mobilisation was a crucial contributory factor to the success of Together for Yes.

Finance, Governance and Fundraising

To manage the entire campaign, and to be able to demonstrate full compliance to both State and media sources, a robust governance, finance and regulatory framework was established for local and HQ-based finance-related activities. Over the three-month campaign period, through targeted activities (online donations, crowdfunding, events and merchandise), the campaign raised an astonishing €1.6 million. The high-speed success of the crowd-funding drive

especially gave an important boost to campaign morale during its launch phase. The importance of putting robust financial governance and compliance in place early on along with a very effective fundraising strategy, were vital to the success of the campaign.

Politics

Any campaign seeking to change law must necessarily engage with law-makers and political parties. In Ireland, only a small number of politicians maintained parliamentary focus on the effects of the abortion ban in the decades before the referendum, while the majority of elected representatives remained silent on the issue. The organisations comprising Together for Yes, as well as many allied organisations, had engaged in formal lobbying before, during and after the 2016 General Election, and continued to lobby until the referendum was announced. In campaigns of this scale there will be inevitably different views and perspectives on the role of politicians: setting clear ground rules from the start significantly helps manage this. For example, Together for Yes was clear that it was a grassroots, civil society alliance, and that politicians could not speak on behalf of the campaign. Together for Yes did not invite elected representatives to speak on its national platforms, although it was more flexible when it came to local politicians speaking at local meetings. Media typically tended to give prominence to politicians' analysis and opinions of the campaign, making the need for Together for Yes to maintain an independent stance organisationally and operationally all the more important.

The Together for Yes Platform

By setting up a 'Together for Yes Platform' at the start of the campaign, a vehicle was created for a growing diversity of civil society organisations to become campaign allies and to develop their own independent campaigning activities. The Platform drew in mainstream organisations and coalitions that a wide range of different audiences could identify with and trust. These played a very useful role in giving wider visibility to the campaign, as well as supporting it through their own activities. Disability organisations, human rights groups, migrant organisations, medical and health care groups, trade unions and many others were publicly seen to support a Yes vote in their own voices and in their own ways.

The Campaign Shop and Merchandise

The Abortion Rights Campaign, the REPEAL project and others had been using branded clothing and merchandise for several years as a way of creating visibility while also generating funds. The Together for Yes campaign continued this approach using the existing shop systems and distribution processes of the Abortion Rights Campaign. Wearing campaign merchandise was a 'high visibility' action signalling support for repeal which also created solidarity and promoted

dialogue. This was particularly felt by canvassers and people working on the ground. In addition to the online shop, a city centre shop was set up and staffed by volunteers while local organisers ensured Yes merchandise was distributed country-wide and ran pop-up shops in various locations. Long queues for the shops attracted media interest and generated social media content.

Monitoring Progress

In order to implement strategy and monitor campaign development, in-depth monitoring of campaign operations and activities as well as a clear campaign overview were required on a daily basis. To achieve this, Together for Yes developed a system to track and display data from six priority monitoring areas, including:

- Canvassing returns
- Public opinion polls
- Insights from strategic advisors
- Media monitoring
- Internal campaign communications and structures
- Fundraising.

An element that could be relevant to future electoral campaigns is the Canvas Together tool. This allowed the recording of:

1. number of doors knocked,
2. number of doors opened,
3. aggregated returns of Yes, No and Maybe.

Within each 'Doors opened' segment the tool allowed for sentiment and other relevant data to be probed and recorded anonymously. Canvassers inputted data daily. This allowed close tracking of attitudes, efficacy of strategy, impacts of No side's counter-messaging, and other detail. The tool could transform this information into statistical data. In the weeks prior to the referendum, the Canvas Together tool was producing forecasts within 3% of the final result.

Part 4: Overviews

Campaign Milestones

Campaign milestones identified by respondents to the interviews, focus groups and survey undertaken for this Review include:

Crowdfunding: The scale of support for fundraising demonstrated personal commitment to the issue; fostered empowerment; alerted the public to a dynamic movement; and facilitated visibility.

Canvassing (and 'guerrilla' canvassing): Although challenging for some people, the opportunity for dialogue within communities was instructive and uplifting for many, and 'guerrilla' actions at local traffic hubs or bridges for example created memorable cohesion.

Television debates: The negativity towards Together for Yes and repeal of the 8th Amendment in one of the early TV debates galvanised pro-Repeal supporters to mobilise even more strongly. Later debates exposed the weakness of the No side position and revealed its fault-lines. The strong performance of pro-repeal politicians was particularly commented on by respondents to this review.

Solidarity: Respondents noted solidarity across communities, ages, genders and personal beliefs, the importance of subtle and overt signs of acceptance, and the social continuum of activism passing through the generations.

Campaign Challenges

Pace: Some campaigners felt a sense of pressure in reaction to a speedily unfolding campaign.

Lack of respect for female leadership: The dismissive, often negative tone of some media towards the all-women campaign leadership was noted by many respondents.

Message discipline: The campaign messages and overall tone were embraced by the vast majority of campaigners, although this had been difficult for many activists who had long held the position that abortion is first and foremost a human rights issue. They found it challenging to hold the campaign's strategic framing of abortion as private and personal and primarily an issue of health care. They expressed concern about some of the shifts in language – for example, 'decision' being used typically instead of 'choice', and some also had difficulty with the focus on testimonials speaking to the rarer so-called 'hard' cases, rather than stories about the more common experiences of the majority of women who need abortion.

Marginalised voices: The campaign's focus on messaging addressed to mainstream voters limited opportunities to ensure a broad diversity of spokespeople, although organisations within the Together for Yes Platform functioned as a source of more diverse experiences, specifically for the stories of marginalised and vulnerable women.

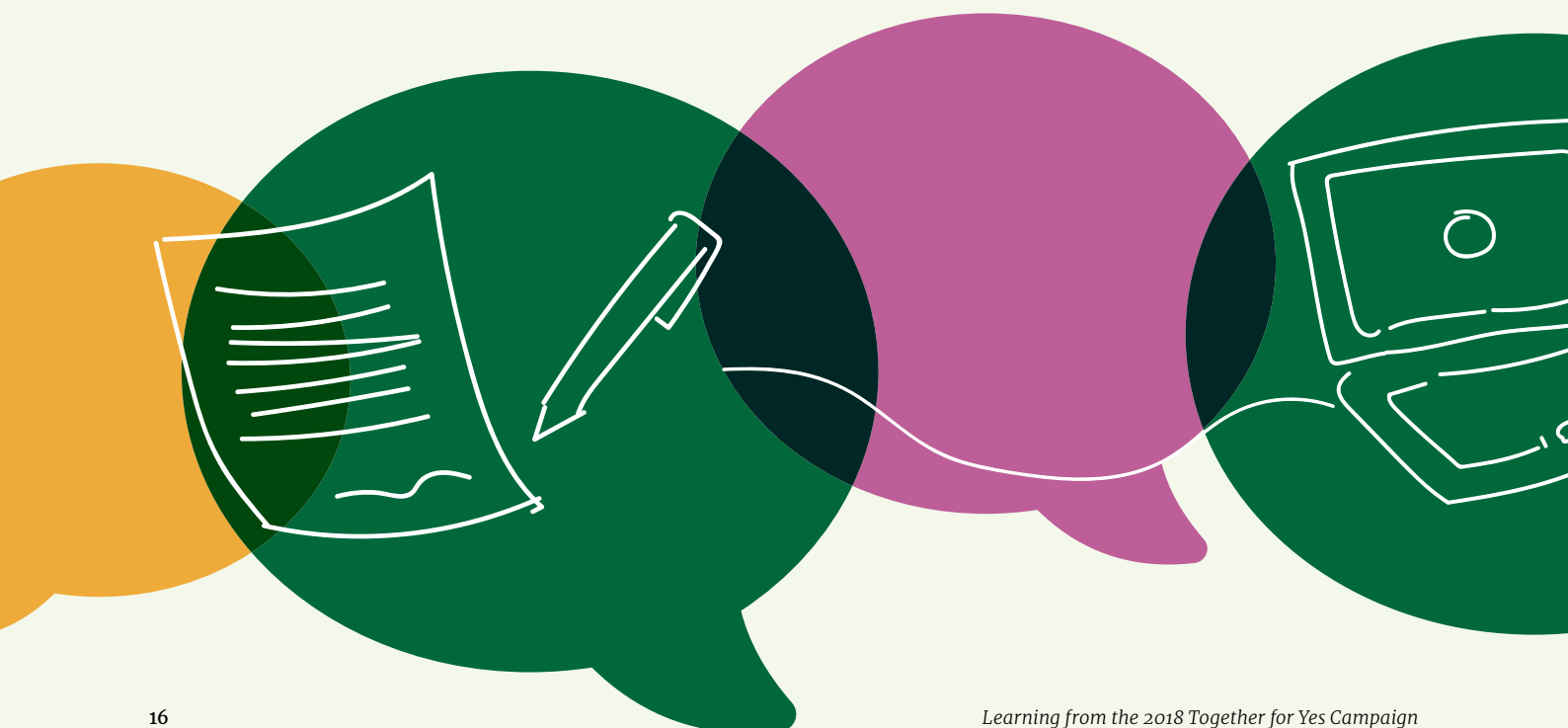
Urban-rural divide: Pressure on resources to keep-up with the speed and scale of mobilisation presented challenges which inevitably led to some friction. Some respondents expressed a sense of a capital city / rest of country-divide in various different ways.

The No campaign and the need for 'balance': At the outset, the No campaign's materials instantly populated the public space, causing some anxiety for pro-Repealers. Alongside this, the legal requirement in Ireland for the national broadcaster to ensure strict 50/50 coverage to each side in referendum debates, often going to absurd lengths to do so, often exposed the public to extreme and distressing views. Although the 'balance' rule applies only to the national broadcaster (RTÉ) other media also generally followed it.

Canvassing on personal issues: As respondents reported, the very act of canvassing on what is a deeply personal issue for many campaigners as well as for the voters, was often met with insensitivity, stigmatising and personal comments, and blatant misogyny. Respondents stressed the need for consistent peer support.

Key Learnings

- Coalition-building enables organisations to define and agree a common objective and strategic direction; develop cooperative ways of working; learn to manage differences and disagreement; encourages pooling of resources; and enhances issue visibility and 'reach'.
- Start the process of pre-campaign preparation – coalition-building, review of previous campaigns, research, and message development – as early as possible.
- Build a strong evidence base as early as possible.
- Define campaign strategy in light of research and previous successful campaign experiences. Keep it constantly under review, revising when necessary.
- Build and empower a strong activist base.
- Never lose sight of your campaign audiences, and tailor communications to reach them specifically. A campaign is not about proving a point but about convincing the voters / your audiences.
- Choose spokespeople based on your research and train and support and prepare them to deliver the campaign messages effectively. Recognise that many people are neither 'for' nor 'against' but are somewhere in the middle. Respect that, listen to them, and give them the opportunity to express their views in a safe space.



- Campaign messaging needs to convey information, provide evidence, and have emotional strength and appeal.
- Train and support your canvassing teams as carefully as you train your media spokespeople. A strategy is only as good as the people who deliver it.
- All campaign tools are important, including: traditional and social media; ground mobilisation and canvassing; lobbying and so on. Always look closely at the campaign context, circumstances and resources to work out the right balance between them.
- Develop and implement tools for monitoring campaign progress.
- Talk with the voters about the issue: never tell them what they 'should' think or feel or do.
- There is no 'golden campaign template' because no two campaigns are the same. The particular histories, contexts and circumstances of your campaign are key determinants.
- Clear leadership; sound campaign management and discipline; well-researched messaging; excellent communications; strong governance and financial control; ample funds; and well-supported, committed and passionate campaigners. These are the bedrock of any campaign.





Part 1: Introduction & Methodology

1.1 Introduction

Together for Yes was the central Irish civil society campaign for a Yes vote in a national referendum in May 2018 to repeal the Eighth Amendment (Article 40.3.3) from the Irish Constitution. Repeal of the Eighth Amendment would open up the way for the provision of legal abortion services in the Republic of Ireland.

By a stunning margin of 66.4% to 33.6%, the Irish electorate voted in favour of removing the long-standing ban on abortion, which had been inserted in the Constitution following a referendum in 1983. The scale of the Yes vote astonished seasoned social and political commentators as well as campaigners. The landslide victory was widely seen as an indication of a seismic shift in attitudes in a country traditionally heavily influenced by Catholic social teaching and vehemently opposed to abortion.

The aim of this review of the Together for Yes campaign is to provide personal perspectives on the campaign for future use by social change activists and campaigners in Ireland and internationally, and across a wide variety of contexts.

This Review was carried out in late-2018. It evolved through interviews with key actors, a number of focus groups, and an online survey of a wide pool of people who worked throughout the campaign and across the country. Some of their voices, unassigned, are included throughout.



1.2 Methodology

This Review was commissioned with the aim of producing “a resource outlining the learnings of Together for Yes for future use by campaigns for social change in Ireland and internationally”.

Too often campaigning wisdom gets lost, is left untold or is buried in the stories of individual campaigners. This means that without practical and easy access to the realities of prior experience campaigners often find themselves ‘reinventing the wheel’.

The goals of this Review are to:

1. Identify the lessons which can be learned from the Together for Yes campaign.
2. Identify key campaign milestones, obstacles and challenges.
3. Identify learning from the campaign processes as well as from strategy and tactics.
4. Provide key learning points for future campaigns focused on delivering substantial social change.

To achieve these goals, a consultant was commissioned to consult widely with people involved in the campaign. This was done in three main ways:

- Twenty key actors, each of whom played a senior role in the campaign, were interviewed over a four-month period.
- Three focus groups involving a total of 32 people were carried out. One of these groups was made up of members of the campaign headquarters team, a second was of people from Dublin-based local Together for Yes groups and allied organisations, and the third was made up of coordinators within regional Together for Yes groups across Ireland.
- An online survey was also circulated to campaigners. Between September and November 2018, a total of 351 people completed this survey, providing rich information from people who worked on the ground in almost every county in the country (*Appendix 1 presents some survey findings*).

As well as collecting and analysing information from people centrally involved in the campaign, the research also analysed campaign materials, reports, research, media, and drew on reports from two internal reflection days.

Part 1 introduces the Review and its methodology.

Part 2 provides some context about the background of the Together for Yes campaign and discusses its formation.

Part 3 reviews strategy and messaging; the function of each of the seven ‘departments’ or teams in the Together for Yes structure, and draws out the significant learning from each of these.

Part 4 gives an overview of the key learning from the campaign.





Part 2: Forming a Campaign

2.1 The Context: Abortion in Ireland

“The silence surrounding abortion has been deafening, only ruptured every decade or so by a dreadful human tragedy – the loss of a woman’s life or the awful public drama of court cases taken to wrest from the State the right to an abortion here in this country.”³

Throughout the interviews, focus groups and surveys carried out for this Review, people spoke of the need to understand the historical context from which the Together for Yes campaign emerged. The women’s movement in Ireland had fought for decades to overcome a long history of patriarchal control enshrined in law and policy combined with religious teaching (mostly Catholic) in relation to women’s sexuality. Achieving repeal of the 8th Amendment to secure the right to abortion in Ireland was highly significant in the fight to achieve women’s equality, autonomy and agency. From this perspective, the outcome was a major turning point in a long struggle against the forces of religious, moral and cultural conservatism.

The “special recognition” given to the Catholic Church in the 1937 Constitution was deleted by referendum in 1972 (5th Amendment to the Constitution), and over the succeeding decades the power of the Catholic Church and its influence on public policy had been in gradual decline.

The extent of the change in public attitudes to sexuality was clearly demonstrated by the result of the 2015 referendum on the right to marriage for lesbian and gay people. This was won by a large majority (62%) and the Constitution was amended to recognise the equal right to marriage “by two persons without distinction as to their sex” (34th Amendment).⁴ While this result marked very significant change, there could be no presumption that this indicated public support for abortion.

The 2018 referendum was in fact Ireland’s sixth referendum on the issue of abortion.

- The first referendum came in 1983, proposing to amend the Constitution to recognise the equal right to life of a pregnant woman, ‘the mother’, and her developing foetus, ‘the unborn’. Following a bitterly divisive campaign, 66.9% of voters voted in favour of amending the Constitution (Eighth Amendment, Article 40.3.3). This meant that Ireland had one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world and, with the exception of Malta, the most restrictive abortion regime in the European Union.

3 Ailbhe Smyth, foreword to *The Abortion Papers: Ireland* Vol. 2, 2015

4 Healy, Gráinne, Sheehan, Brian & Whelan, Noel (2015) *Ireland Says Yes: The Inside Story of How the Vote for Marriage Equality Was Won*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press/ Merrion Press.

- In 1992, a triple referendum was held as a result of a case known as the X-case. The Supreme Court ruled in the X-case that a 14-year old girl pregnant as a result of rape and who was at risk of suicide, was constitutionally entitled to have an abortion in Ireland. The electorate was asked to vote on three questions:
 - Whether women should have the right to travel to other jurisdictions for abortion.
 - Whether people should have the right to access information about abortion.
 - Whether the threat of suicide should be excluded as a ground for abortion.

The electorate voted in favour of both the right to travel to other jurisdictions for abortion, and the right to access information. The electorate rejected the proposal to exclude the threat of suicide as a ground for abortion (which would have rolled back the X-case judgment).

- In 2002, a fifth referendum again proposed to amend the Constitution to exclude the threat of suicide as a ground for abortion, and to increase the penalties for helping a woman to have an abortion. As it had done in 1992, the electorate rejected this proposal.

The oppressive effects of the Eighth Amendment resulted in distress and suffering, with women travelling for abortion abroad in their thousands every year in the most demeaning and difficult circumstances, typically in deepest secrecy. By law, there was no abortion in Ireland except to save a woman's life, so it happened elsewhere and only for those who had the capacity and the resources to travel, usually to Britain.

Over the years, as had been predicted by anti-amendment campaigners in 1983, a number of abortion-related cases came before the courts. The 1983 Eighth Amendment to the Constitution asserted an unworkable equivalence between the life of a woman and that of a foetus, and successive governments had failed to legislate following its insertion in the Constitution. To give just two examples:

- In 1997, a 13-year-old girl known as Miss C who became pregnant as a result of rape was eventually entitled to have an abortion when the Supreme Court again judged that her life was at risk due to suicide.
- In 2007, a 17-year-old in the care of the State, known as Miss D, wished to terminate an anencephalic pregnancy. She refused to say that she was suicidal, which was by now an established ground for abortion. Her legal guardian, the Health Service Executive, requested that she not be allowed to travel for an abortion. Miss D went to the High Court which ruled that she had the right to travel.⁵

⁵ See Irish Family Planning Association's History of Abortion in Ireland Timeline: <https://www.ifpa.ie/advocacy/abortion-in-ireland-legal-timeline/>

Many international human rights agencies condemned Ireland's abortion regime as a violation of women's human rights. In December 2010 a landmark European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgment in the case of *A, B, and C v Ireland* (ongoing since 2009) strongly criticised the Government for its failure to clarify when abortion could be lawfully carried out in Ireland following the 1992 Supreme Court ruling in the X-case. The Court ruled that Ireland should take the necessary steps to do so.⁶

The issuing of the ECHR expert group report and then its judgment occurred very shortly after the tragic death in October 2012 of Savita Halappanavar. Savita Halappanavar, aged 31, died of sepsis in Galway University Hospital having been refused a termination during an inevitable miscarriage because a foetal heartbeat was still detectable. The report into her death found an over-emphasis on non-intervention until the foetal heart stopped, together with a lack of emphasis on managing the risk of infection and sepsis.⁷

Tens of thousands of people gathered in vigils in Dublin, in Galway and elsewhere in Ireland in an unprecedented expression of public outrage. This was followed by the largest e-action campaign in Ireland organised by the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) where over 72,000 emails were sent to TDs throughout Ireland calling for legislation for the X-case to save women's lives in pregnancy.

As a consequence of the ECHR judgment in the A, B and C case and of the national outrage at the death of Savita Halappanavar, in July 2013 the Government finally legislated for the 1992 Supreme Court ruling in the X-case. The *Protection of Life during Pregnancy Act 2013* made abortion legal where a pregnant woman's life was in danger, including through a risk of suicide. The legislation was widely criticised by pro-choice campaigners and others as highly restrictive and because of the criminal sanctions and barriers to access that it set out.

The tragic and needless death of Savita Halappanavar, because of the lack of medical intervention due to the Eighth Amendment, became a tipping point, galvanising the pro-choice movement into concerted action for change. The three core organisations that would go on to found the Together for Yes campaign were active at this time:

- The Irish Choice Network, precursor to the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), had formed in July 2012 and organised the first annual March for Choice in September 2012.
- The Abortion Rights Campaign formally launched in January 2013 and commenced building a grassroots movement for 'Free, Safe and Legal'

⁶ The Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) History of Abortion in Ireland: <https://www.ifpa.ie/advocacy/abortion-in-ireland-legal-timeline/>

⁷ See Holland, Kitty, (2013) *Savita: The Tragedy That Shook a Nation* Transworld Ireland

abortion access through regional ARC groups around the country, and dedicated national working groups to focus on policy, partnerships, media, admin and creative campaigning.

- In 2012, women and couples who had been obliged to travel abroad to access abortions in cases of fatal foetal anomaly had come together to form a new group, Terminations for Medical Reasons (TFMR). They began to tell their stories on national and local media, talking about their deeply distressing experiences and how they had suffered due to the Eighth Amendment.
- In 2013, the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC), in consultation with its membership, established its membership advisory group on abortion and subsequently published a position paper recommending free, safe and legal abortion.
- In autumn 2013, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment was set up with the aim of building a broad national platform of organisations to campaign for a referendum to remove the prohibition against abortion from the Constitution. With 12 founding member organisations, by the time the referendum was called in March 2018, more than 120 organisations had joined the Coalition.



2.2 Setting up Together for Yes

How Together for Yes Emerged

The years from 2013 to 2017 were a crucial period of strategic issue-definition and framing, public education and awareness-raising, sustained political lobbying and wide mobilisation of volunteer activists. During this time, foundations were laid, strategy formulated, research carried out, and relationships were built and consolidated.

Importantly, during these years, a range of organisations, including the Abortion Rights Campaign, Amnesty International Ireland, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Irish Family Planning Association and the National Women's Council of Ireland were each working separately to build a strong international human rights case (through, for example, the UN, and the Council of Europe) for the Government to lift the ban on abortion in Ireland.

By the time a General Election was called for March 2016, it was clear that a rapidly growing social movement for 'Repeal' was putting pressure on the Government to hold a referendum on the issue. Responding to the growing pressure, in May 2016 in its Programme for Partnership Government,⁸ the new minority government undertook to establish a Citizens' Assembly which would be charged with making recommendations on the Eighth Amendment.

The Citizens' Assembly

Broadly following the model of the Constitutional Convention set up in 2014 to consider a range of issues including whether a referendum should be held on equal marriage rights for lesbian and gay people, the Citizens' Assembly was designed to be an exercise in deliberative democracy. The central concept was that with the benefit of impartial and factual advice 99 citizens would consider a series of important constitutional, legal and policy issues, chaired by a former justice of the Supreme Court. The Assembly set up by the Irish parliament in 2016 considered a number of issues, on which it made recommendations for constitutional and policy change.

The Eighth Amendment was the first area considered by the Assembly. In April 2017 it recommended that abortion should be permitted in the State in a wide range of circumstances, including to safeguard a woman's mental or physical health, and for socio-economic reasons. Significantly, it recommended that abortion should be available without restriction in the first trimester (44%), and

⁸ https://www.merrionstreet.ie/MerrionStreet/en/ImageLibrary/Programme_for_Partnership_Government.pdf

up to 22 weeks' gestation (44%). A majority of the members voted to allow for abortion in all 13 circumstances that it considered. (See Appendix 4)

The outcome and recommendations from the Assembly went much further than most observers had expected.

When the Government announced that the Citizens' Assembly would consider the Eighth Amendment a number of seasoned abortion campaigners, sensing that the time was right for a referendum, feared that the government was procrastinating on decision-making. The new Government was also in a minority within parliament, relying on support from a diverse group of independents, and there was a popular sense that it might not last long enough to implement any recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly. Nonetheless, pro-Repeal organisations decided to contribute constructively to the work of the Assembly and engaged fully with it. In the event, the Government did last, the Assembly made progressive recommendations on abortion provision, and a year later the referendum happened.

“The Citizen’s Assembly showed that politics can and should take place also outside the Dáil [parliament]. It showed that participatory democracy can help politicians make more informed decisions. As a result, we put a very well-considered and very well-rounded proposal to the people.”

Learning from the Citizens' Assembly

Opportunities: It is clear that at the start some campaigners had legitimate concerns about the Assembly being used by government to avoid action by placing it in the 'long grass'. On reflection however, it is now possible to see the value of engaging with processes of deliberative democracy. A similar process (a Constitutional Convention) had been used to consider marriage equality in 2015, and in both situations when citizens were presented with the facts they voted overwhelmingly based on those facts and principles of justice. A senior figure in the campaign remarked, referring to the Citizen's Assembly, “If there's a ball in play, then you need to play it”: meaning that it was important to take the opportunity presented and to work for the best outcome.

Building alliance: The Citizen's Assembly also provided an opportunity for campaigning organisations to work together – both behind the scenes and publicly. Some of those interviewed expressed the opinion that this was really a test-run for the alliance which would go on to form Together for Yes, and as such was a valuable part of the process which resulted in securing a Yes vote in the referendum.

In April 2017, following detailed discussion and debate,⁹ the Assembly voted overwhelmingly in favour of a change to the Constitution and for a provision for the Oireachtas (houses of parliament) to be empowered to legislate on abortion.¹⁰ Further, the Assembly favoured progressive regulation of abortion, with over two thirds of the members voting in favour of access to abortion ‘with no restriction as to reason’ (i.e. on request).

In June 2017, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, (a parliamentary committee) was tasked with considering the report and recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly. Following extensive hearings and discussion the Committee upheld most of the Assembly’s core recommendations.¹¹

It is in the context of these three events that in the summer and autumn of 2017 lengthy discussions took place between a number of organisations on forming a structure to lead a campaign for a referendum which was virtually certain to be called in the near future.¹²

As soon as the Joint Oireachtas Committee made its recommendations to government in December 2017, three organisations agreed to work together, and following intensive negotiations, to form a new campaign organisation, Together for Yes. These organisations were: The Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC), the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment and the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCi). The lead representatives of these organisations had a long track record and public profile on the issue, as well as campaigning and mobilisation experience. Their organisations had wide national networks and grassroots support.

The three organisations spent a number of weeks working with a skilled facilitator on the design of a campaign structure. Two members of each organisation participated in this process. It was agreed that the campaign would have three co-Directors, an Executive, a Campaign Manager, a Communications Manager and seven work streams, or teams, each headed up by a Team Lead (See Section 5). The co-Directors of Together For Yes asked the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) to join the Together for Yes Executive, which they subsequently did.

9 Report and Recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly the Eight Amendment of the Constitution <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/The-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-on-the-Eighth-Amendment-of-the-Constitution/Final-Report-incl-Appendix-A-D.pdf>

10 In Ireland, for constitutional change to occur, a referendum must be held. Neither the courts nor any other mechanism can bring about constitutional change.

11 The Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Eight Amendment completed its review of the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly. Its report concluded that Article 40.3.3° should be removed from the Constitution: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/32/eighth-amendment-constitution/>

12 Long-time organisational advocates for women’s reproductive rights and abortion included, among others, Amnesty Ireland, Choice Ireland, Doctors for Choice, the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, the Irish Family Planning Association, Terminations for Medical Reasons, and the Union of Students of Ireland, as well as the Abortion Rights Campaign, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, and the National Women’s Council of Ireland.

The Name: Together for Yes

Having established the Executive, an early task was to establish the campaign identity and to agree on a campaign name. This first-principle decision led to important discussions about how the campaign should present itself: some had reservations about the name ‘Together for Yes’ and tried to come up with alternatives. For others, Together for Yes was not just a name but a concept full of possibility, ready to be ‘filled’ and given meaning by people rallying around the campaign. The name was a model for building a broad-based alliance that stood ‘for’ rather than ‘against’ something. And it was an inclusive concept, allowing disparate groups and individuals to come together on this single issue. This view carried the day and was embraced by the Executive.

The campaign launched in Dublin on 22 March, 2018 receiving a great deal of media and political attention. The name was widely disseminated.

The media coverage of the launch did not focus on the individual lead organisations, describing it rather as a broad civil society organisation which had cross-political party support. This was an early success. It framed Together for Yes as a national movement of people and perspectives coming together across a wide spectrum, and freed it up from being identified with specific individuals and organisations.

Learning

Deliberation and identification: The name eventually landed on after a process of deliberation was not immediately identified with. However, as one respondent pointed out, at its core that name was inherently positive – it was for something, rather than against something. Further, it acted to signify a broad movement, not over-identifying any one group – a strategy that does not allow opponents to focus attention on the histories or personalities of a single organisation, and so distract attention from the core issue.

2.3 Campaign Structure and Organisation

Drawing on classic campaign organisational models as well as directly on their own campaigning experience, the Together for Yes Executive developed an organisational structure specific to the needs of the campaign.

Campaign co-Directors

The co-Directors were Ailbhe Smyth, co-founder and Convener of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, Orla O'Connor Director of the National Women's Council, and Grainne Griffin, founding member and former co-Convener of the Abortion Rights Campaign. Representing their respective organisations, the co-Directors had overall responsibility for the strategic direction and operation of the campaign as a whole.

Campaign Executive

The Executive functioned as the governing board of the Together for Yes campaign and met weekly at least, to determine and review the strategic and operational progress of the campaign. It comprised the three co-Directors, an additional representative from each of the core organisations, and two members of the IFPA. The members were: Grainne Griffin and Sarah Monaghan (ARC); Ailbhe Smyth and Sinead Kennedy (Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment); Orla O'Connor and Silke Paasche (National Women's Council of Ireland), Niall Behan and Maeve Taylor (Irish Family Planning Association).

Campaign Manager

The Campaign Manager, Deirdre Duffy, was appointed in March 2018, charged with managing and implementing the campaign strategy. This included setting up organisational processes, managing the Team Leads of the key campaign departments, and ongoing active monitoring and reporting of progress and strategy roll-out.

Governance and Finance

A robust governance, finance and regulatory framework was put in place headed up by Suzanne Handley.

Communications

A Communications manager, Amy Rose Hart, was appointed to lead the campaign Communication team.

Department Leads (Team Leads)

Areas identified as crucial to the roll-out of the campaign were: Communications; Fundraising; Political; Mobilisation; Platform; Evidence, Data, Risk; and Campaign Supports which grouped a number of areas including the finance and governance, the shop and volunteer management. Each area was

managed by a Team Lead, who was charged with developing and implementing plans for their team, monitoring progress, managing staff, and reporting to the Campaign Manager. Merchandise and Materials was added later as another work stream. Within the Communications team there were leads for Social Media, Storylab, and Digital and Production.

Strategic Advisory Group

The co-Directors invited a dozen individuals with expertise and experience in relevant areas to provide non-binding expert advice. The Strategic Advisory Group met regularly with the co-Directors and campaign manager throughout the campaign, providing valuable perspectives and insights.

Campaign Platform

The Campaign Platform brought together a wide diversity of pro-Repeal civil society organisations. It enabled organisations to have an informed working relationship with Together for Yes while maintaining their own organisational independence.

“You had to look at how we were going to win this referendum. It wasn’t about our individual organisations; it was about Together for Yes. It took some settling in, but I think we got there very quickly.”

Learning

Creating structure: Together for Yes applied a mixture of conventional and unconventional structures. It was somewhat unconventional to have three co-Directors, all of them women. But the hierarchical reporting structure was conventional. There is no optimum structure formula that applies to all: – every campaign needs to tailor its structure to reflect its inherent strengths and meet its needs. The formation of Together for Yes happened in a highly pressurised environment, where the opposition appeared to be organised earlier and to be significantly better funded, and where some media were questioning the visibility and competence of the Yes campaign. This is often the reality of campaigning – it evolves in a particular context and in response to specific practical needs and resources.

Forming alliances: The coming together of three organisations with different cultures was complex and needed time and attention, as did the formation of close alliances with other organisations and groups. It is important to analyse the pressures on constituent groups and allies, and to focus on strengthening relationships and the capacity to work together to achieve the common goal. The process of achieving cohesion is an integral first-step campaign activity, and not simply a technical matter of establishing a formal structure.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey t-shirt and jeans, is climbing a metal ladder. She is holding a large white sign with both hands. The sign has the text "Sometimes a private matter needs public support." at the top, followed by "VOTE" and "Yes" in large letters, and a speech bubble icon. The background is a city street with buildings and a clear sky.

Sometimes a
private matter
needs public
support.

VOTE

Yes

www.togetherfor...

Part 3: Campaign Strategy, Process & Tactics

3.1 Research, Messaging & Strategy

“Together for Yes is by far, the most well-prepared campaign I’ve ever worked on. The research was fantastic”

The process of conducting research and developing effective messaging for the general public began long before the referendum was called by government. This preparatory work, initiated and led by the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, was to prove fundamental to the success of the Together for Yes campaign.

This section outlines the approach and research process begun in 2016 that continued throughout the campaign. The research process yielded key insights that shaped the strategic direction of the campaign. It also functioned to strengthen the relationships between the different organisations which came together for the research process and to embed the concept and practice of shared ideas, knowledge and resources.

Research and Messaging

Recognising the fundamental importance of research in effective campaigning, and the need to find new ways of communicating the historically contentious issue of abortion in Ireland, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment decided in 2016 to commission **focus group research** to ascertain how people thought and felt about abortion and the situation in Ireland under the Eighth Amendment. They approached a number of key strategic organisations with a proposal and invited them to become partners in the commissioned research process.¹³

The research produced richly-nuanced understandings of what people thought about the issue of abortion and how they felt about change, revealing that a majority of the electorate were troubled by the status quo, but cautious and wary of change. This early information provided a sound base to both express the wish for change and address the fears of the ‘concerned centre’ of the electorate. Follow-on focus group research was commissioned during 2017, and then again by Together for Yes during the campaign itself in 2018.

¹³ In addition to the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, the research partners included: Abortion Rights Campaign, Amnesty Ireland, Irish Council for Civil Liberties, Irish Family Planning Association, National Women’s Council of Ireland. The Union of Students in Ireland also had an involvement.

The First Series of Focus groups: Discovering who people would listen to.

The objectives of the initial series of six focus groups with a cross-section of Irish society were:

- To understand the Irish electorate's knowledge of the issues as well as its opinions, and to test for motivations, barriers, fears, language, and tone.
- To identify potential campaign messages, reasons to believe, and trusted voices that would connect and resonate with a cross-spectrum of the Irish public.
- To get a sense of how different campaign approaches would resonate with the Irish public.

Amongst the many aspects of voter sentiment, the research revealed who people trusted most in this space. Many felt that medical professionals with relevant clinical expertise on women and baby welfare were who they could trust most. Women who had had an abortion were the other trusted voice for voters. The research also found that people considered politicians would, 'sit on the fence' and that, if anything, their support for the campaign might provoke a protest vote. The (Catholic) Church was regarded as out-of-touch, constricted and morally precarious, although Catholic upbringing still played a role in people's moral compass.

This research provided vital insights into 'where people were at' on the issue and encouraged the organisations to think in terms of developing a strategic messaging approach based on 'understanding where people are listening from, rather than where we are talking from'.

What campaign leaders understood well in advance of the start of the referendum campaign was therefore that for conditional supporters the main consideration was one of **empathy**. People were moved by a sense of caring, and a desire to be supportive, not punitive. They also wanted to be able to have reasonable conversations, not divisive arguments, and they wanted to think and talk about how this seemingly intractable problem could be fixed. They wanted solutions, although were not sure what these solutions should look like. Based on the research, the campaign understood that everyone benefits from a respectful space where we are listened to first and then get to consider the facts (i.e. the realities of abortion in women's lives), and are trusted to come to our own conclusions.

A further series of focus group research was carried out in 2017. During the referendum campaign, in April 2018, Together for Yes also commissioned focus group research which further expanded these insights and helped guide campaign strategy right up to polling day.

The 'Every Woman' model developed by the National Women's Council in 2017 was rooted in the focus group research and demonstrated the value of creating spaces for the public to engage in conversations and adopting a discursive, non-combative tone for the campaign: one that acknowledges conflicting emotion, listens and responds to concerns.

Every Woman model: The National Women's Council of Ireland

In November 2017 the National Women's Council of Ireland launched a model for women's reproductive health care called *Every Woman*, which impacted significantly on how Together for Yes would frame its messaging in the 2018 referendum.

The *Every Woman* healthcare model was informed both by the research conducted during 2016 and 2017, and by consultations with NWCI members and women and men from across Ireland. It set out what reproductive healthcare services, including abortion, women and girls need.

The message of the *Every Woman* model was that all women need access to the right kind of care for them, which includes the option of abortion.

'We need to start from a point where we talk about the needs and experiences of women, and not from a point of restrictions.' Orla O'Connor, NWCI

NWCI also hosted a series of open conversations across the country on abortion and reproductive healthcare. These non-directive facilitated conversations provided factual information about reproductive healthcare, including abortion in Ireland and provided a safe space for people to ask questions and explore their own views.

For activists and campaigners used to arguing and defending the validity of their position against often hostile opposition, the 'listen first' approach can seem counter-intuitive and risky. Understanding that the campaign needed to speak directly to the cautious, conditional and less invested voters in ways that were relevant and would motivate them to vote, turned the typically more combative approach on its head, and created a very different tone and set of messages for the campaign, from posters and leaflets through the television debates on the doorstep, and even on social media. This became the basis of the Together for Yes campaign strategy.

Delivering the Message

“Doctors were the new priests. People don’t trust church or media or politicians. But they do trust doctors. They said they trusted doctors and they trusted women who had had abortions to tell the truth.”

The messaging for Together for Yes centred on access to abortion care rather than on reproductive rights. The distinction is significant. Talking about abortion as a health care need, and placing it in the context of women’s health care more broadly reflected the public’s understanding of abortion as a private and personal matter between a woman and her doctor.

Ongoing research confirmed that the electorate had higher levels of trust in two groups of people to talk about abortion: women who have had an abortion, and doctors. It was very clear that the voices of these groups needed to be heard throughout the campaign.

Ultimately, the three key message principles underpinning campaign strategy were the ‘three C’s’ of: Care, Compassion, and Change.

Learning

“If your message is wrong, if it doesn’t reach the people you need to convince, then no amount of money you spend on posters or online ads will make a difference.”

Communicating the message: Providing an early opportunity for people to engage in the issue in a safe and comfortable way is an important part of creating a real conversation and a greater awareness of the need for change.

Background research: Developing an understanding of public opinion and motivation was key to the development of Together for Yes. Early engagement by the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment with an informed and trusted research team produced nuanced findings that gave deep insights into people’s thoughts and positions. This provided the campaign with the evidence it needed to plan, challenge and develop its own assumptions, its strategy and a communications approach.

3.2 Developing a Supporter Base

The development of a strong, visible supporter base was essential for two reasons: to build public pressure on Government to call a referendum, and then to provide the people power to deliver the referendum campaign itself. Small campaigning groups like Choice Ireland and Cork Women's Right to Choose had been working on pro-choice issues for many years but from 2013 onwards, and in the 18 months before the referendum in particular, the number of volunteer activists organising for repeal increased exponentially. This was clearly visible at the Abortion Rights Campaign March for Choice which provided an annual marker and reminder of the scale of the public pro-choice presence. From the first march in September 2012, the size of the crowd roughly doubled each year with tens of thousands marching in September 2017 calling for a referendum.

The Abortion Rights Campaign committed to actively building a national network of groups working to achieve 'Free, Safe, Legal' abortion access. It was widely understood that a referendum would not be won or lost in Dublin, that a connected network across Ireland would be necessary to secure a Yes, and that a solid base requires considerable investment and time.

Initially, ARC worked alongside four allied groups outside of Dublin. By 2017, this had grown to 36 groups across Ireland, each receiving guidance and training from the national ARC structure. The development of a Regional Toolkit provided a manual for regional organising which assisted groups from initial set-up through recruitment of more members, holding public meetings and creative actions, managing finances and social media accounts and so on. ARC rolled out training across the country to develop campaigning skills and in particular to enable activists to understand and discuss abortion issues in an accessible and informed manner and to equip them to deal with the biases and stigma prevalent in the general population. A strong emphasis on social and participatory activities such as clothes swaps, social events, 'choice-mas carol singing' and fundraising also helped build strong and ongoing engagement with members and supporters.

A range of other groups across regional areas or the professions, the trade union movement, various professions, and personal situations also developed strong supporter bases and mobilised for repeal. These included, for example, the long-standing Cork Right to Choose group, and issue-specific groups such as Parents for Choice. Most of these groups also became members of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment.

In 2016, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment had commissioned research to identify existing pro-choice and pro-repeal local groups and networks across the country (National Mapping Project, Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, 2017). As part of this regional research project, in 2016 and 2017, the Coalition also organised two open 'Regional Networking' workshops to bring the diverse groups together.

The Campaign Strategy

The Together for Yes campaign strategy emerged from the research process outlined above and was developed, honed and articulated by the co-Directors and Campaign Manager in discussion with the Executive. The Strategic Advisory Group provided constructive advice, and the campaign leadership maintained a continuous close engagement with the campaign research and messaging consultants with whom the core organisations had worked closely over the preceding years.

The strategic aim was to achieve a majority Yes vote in the referendum. The qualitative research, as well as results from the regular polling commissioned by newspapers¹⁴ showed that the largest body of support was conditional – often referred to by the media as ‘soft’. It was clear that to win the referendum, Together for Yes needed to focus its strategic activity on reaching and engaging with this ‘concerned centre’, or ‘middle ground’.

Along with the expertise of doctors and other health care professionals, an emphasis on the personal stories or testimonials of women’s and couples’ own experiences were central to shifting public conversations about abortion. This approach also created an evidence-based, non-confrontational and positive campaign strategy.

Three **strategic phases** were identified for the campaign, and strategy was developed accordingly:

1. Inform and Engage (first four weeks)
2. Persuade and Motivate (six ‘middle’ weeks)
3. Get out the vote (final 10 days)

The overarching strategy was summarised in a brief one-page statement (see Appendix 4). This was maintained as the strategic spine of the campaign throughout, with adjustments being made as the campaign evolved and performance was evaluated.

¹⁴ During the course of the campaign, major polls were commissioned by The Irish Times; Irish Independent; Sunday Business Post; Sunday Times (Ireland) and others.

Learning

Distilling the project: The ability of a campaign to distil its essence and to translate it into a clear strategy and straightforward messages is fundamental to success. The simplicity of the Together for Yes one-page strategy belies the complex research and long discussion process that informed it, and the scale of the infrastructure needed to deliver it.

Benefiting from prior experience: Gather as much experience and learning as possible from earlier campaigns. Key Together for Yes campaign personnel (including the leadership) had been involved in some or all of the previous abortion referendum campaigns over the years, as well as the Yes Equality (marriage equality) campaign in 2015, and carried with them very valuable lessons of both what worked and what did not.

Allowing adequate time for process: Agreeing on a strategy and a working structure needs time, patience, and open minds. Inevitably, bringing together three organisations with quite different aims, structures and cultures was a challenge. Differences had to be worked through, and structures put in place before the strategy could be finalised. Together for Yes called on facilitation support in achieving agreed working structures and systems before the formal campaign launch.



Operationalising the Strategy

The Campaign Manager worked with the Team Leads to operationalise each phase. Each Team Lead in turn developed a plan and fed it back to the Campaign Manager who in turn brought it to the co-Directors.

The detailed implementation plans for each team included targets, timelines, division of tasks and measurements. For example, the *Get Out the Vote* mobilisation and messaging stage was conceived and prepared far in advance, which facilitated maximum impact in the final week of the campaign.

Learning

Pre-campaign preparation: Pre-campaign planning and preparation is essential, and as far in advance as possible. It means that working relationships can be formed, research conducted, strategic and infrastructural planning well advanced, funding raised and activist mobilisation progressed so the campaign can hit the ground running. Advance preparation is all the more vital because as the pace of a campaign rapidly speeds up and thinking time is in short supply.

Pacing: Pace impacts directly on strategy delivery in any campaign. The official 2018 referendum campaign ran for a total of 68 days which is relatively long for referendum campaigns in Ireland. However, for the scale of work Together for Yes was taking on, it was a short period in which to develop and deliver complex plans across three phases. As a result, and sometimes in response to exterior developments, elements of the campaign had to be designed, delivered, reviewed or redirected at breakneck speed. To illustrate: a week out from the end of each phase the strategy was reviewed and a plan put in place for the forthcoming weeks, but at times 'a week out from the end of a phase' was already overlapping with the next phase. Teams needed to 'embrace the pace', but also to have a coherent plan to fall back on.

Identifying strategic operators: It is difficult to succinctly articulate the qualities of 'strategic operators', but the following are some of the qualities observed in the Together for Yes team:

- Many were experienced in large scale campaigning, including in previous referendums. This meant that they understood the pace, dynamics and tactics of the opposition and so were not surprised or derailed by dramatic occurrences (such as TV debates).
- Many were also experienced in managing complex projects, including complex stakeholder relationships and management.

Working strategically: The ability to work strategically is not solely about experience. It includes approaches that can be learnt. These include the ability to build strong working relationships, to project plan and manage, to build teams, to reflect and re-evaluate approaches rapidly, to align with decision-making processes, to prioritise, to develop a deep understanding of the issues, and to remain focused on the end goal.



3.3 Evidence and Data

“Aligning the messaging with the data was utterly crucial. The data pointed us to the key target audiences as well as to who the message carriers were”

Although its core organisations were well established, it was essential for Together for Yes to establish its own credentials of trustworthiness from the start. Building a strong evidence-based campaign was therefore essential. Since both focus group research and polling had shown that the primary groups trusted by the electorate were doctors and women who had an experience of abortion, it was agreed that women’s and couples’ personal stories together with medical and healthcare expertise would be the primary sources of evidence for the campaign.

Together for Yes recognised it had many strengths on this score. The campaign was able to draw on a wealth of research on women’s reproductive health care and the Together for Yes core organisations had diversely engaged for many years in research, awareness-raising, and policy formulation in this area.

In keeping with the ‘non-confrontational’ strategy, and as an over-arching tactical approach, a strategic decision was made to avoid getting drawn into the agendas of the opposition. In other words, the opposition would not be allowed to set the terms of the debate.

However, the campaign also recognised that it would need to deal with a range of legal and more technical medical arguments raised by their opponents, and it therefore set about building responses and rebuttals. A highly skilled academic and activist along with a reproductive health care policy expert had specific responsibility for developing rebuttals and responses during the campaign. Their expertise was essential to providing the rebuttal material for use in TV and radio debates, in the media, and to support canvassers.

Medical and Healthcare Arguments

The primary campaigning position of Together for Yes was that abortion was a healthcare issue, one that is fundamentally between a woman and her doctor or healthcare provider. This led to the strategic positioning of doctors and other health professionals front and centre in the campaign: they were the people who could capture and ring-fence complex abortion-related medical issues and win the trust of the electorate.

Doctors for Choice played a vital role in the campaign by supporting doctors to speak clearly about the issues and to actively engage in the campaign, as did other groups such as Midwives for Choice. Individual doctors, including senior gynaecologists and obstetricians, played a key role delivering the campaign messages, as did other highly respected health care personnel, including the Irish Family Planning Association.

Legal Arguments

“You have to be prepared for the legal arguments because people are voting on the fundamental laws of the country. If you don’t have your legal argument honed to meet those arguments you can cause damage to the campaign.”

Although the campaign aimed to avoid getting embroiled in legal technicalities, as had happened in previous abortion referendum campaigns, lawyers nonetheless had an influential part to play in the campaign in clarifying constitutional issues and in analysing and critiquing legislative proposals. Lawyers included members of the Together for Yes campaign team, strategic advisors, and groups such as Lawyers for Repeal and Lawyers for Choice. As an integral part of the campaign, and in sync with its messaging, legal experts were able to deliver authoritative, precise and timely data as the campaign unfolded.



The Role of Personal Stories

Based on previous campaigning knowledge and experience, Together for Yes knew that personal stories would be a bedrock of the campaign. The personal stories of women who had experienced abortion became a linchpin of the campaign's evidence-base, and a key driver of campaign strategy.

Personal stories, rather than theoretical or abstract argument, could reach people with their immediacy and authenticity, and were essential to grounding the credibility and integrity of the campaign.

The functions of story in the campaign were to:

- Inform, educate and raise public awareness.
- Reinforce Together for Yes messages with a 'real-life' evidence base.
- Establish credibility and trust.
- Create understanding and empathy.

A 'Story lab' was set up in January 2018 to identify existing and potential sources for personal stories, and to work with and support individual women and couples to prepare for media and other public events. The core organisations had already done considerable work in this area and drawing on this experience, Together for Yes worked closely with individuals and with organisations such as Terminations for Medical Reasons (TFMR) which played an essential role in carrying Yes campaign messages through the courageous personal testimonials of their members.¹⁵

During the campaign, an independent personal story initiative, called *In Her Shoes*¹⁶ proved particularly impactful on social media and in booklet form. People contributed their stories – some named, some anonymous – which were very widely read and commented on and which canvassers used to help explain the issues on the doorsteps.

15 Many groups and organisations were involved in gathering testimonials. Members of TFMR had started to tell their stories through the media as early as 2012. ARC had gathered a significant collection of personal stories over several years, and had also done educational and training work with women on telling personal stories. The X-ile Project photographed women who had had abortions, and Everyday Stories was a website and exhibition that toured nationally during the referendum campaign.

16 In Her Shoes was an online platform created for Irish women to share their stories of how the 8th amendment had affected them. A collection of some of the stores was also compiled and circulated during the campaign. See <https://www.her.ie/news/in-her-shoes-the-powerful-new-platform-for-women-brutally-impacted-by-the-8th-393655>

Learning

Centralising Stories: Placing the experiences and needs of those most affected by the issues at the centre of the campaign was key. It enhanced the integrity of the campaign and gained public support and trust.

Peer-to-peer advocacy: Peer-to-peer advocacy within professions is vital. In the Together for Yes campaign, doctors and lawyers both listened to and were moved to action, in large part due to the work of their peers.

Flexibility: Flexibility and readiness to adjust tactics and methods is indispensable. The strategic decision that the main campaign spokespeople would be women and couples who had had abortions, doctors, and to some extent lawyers, meant that the campaign leadership had to adjust and take a step back to allow space for the ‘messengers’ in these key domains to speak.

Technical expertise: Key expertise is integral to campaign strategy and tactics. It was immensely important that medical and legal experts, as well as people with personal testimonials, were an integral part of the campaign, rather than working at a remove. This meant they were closely tuned in to the needs, tone and shifts in campaign emphasis as it evolved.

Academic, expert and activist skills: Securing and integrating the skills of academics, experts and activists in devising responses and rebuttals was significant. This was central to providing accessible communications that could be used by different parts of the campaign and by a range of campaign spokespersons.



3.4. Communications

“It was about breaking the stigma of abortion, because to win the referendum we needed to show we were not trying to change Irish society, just trying to recognise that Irish society had changed.”

Communications is at the core of any referendum campaign. Together for Yes personnel sometimes referred to Communications as the ‘air offensive’ and to Mobilisation (including canvassing) as the ‘ground offensive’: these span the totality of the work.

Early on in the campaign, Together For Yes clearly identified the two primary aims of its communications approach as:

- Persuading the undecided or ‘middle ground’ voters to move to vote Yes.
- Motivating Repeal supporters to take action.

As with other aspects of the campaign, the communications strategy was grounded in the focus group research which showed that a majority of people still had fears and reservations about removing the Eighth Amendment and about abortion more generally. Because it had been a deeply contentious issue for so long, people were worried that the referendum campaign would be bitterly divisive with “a lot of shouting matches” and noisy argument. They wanted reasonable debate and time to think through the issue calmly.

The strategic need to promote and maintain a reasonable and moderate tone underpinned Together for Yes communications.

Setting Up the Communications Team

The three organisations comprising Together for Yes each had extensive experience of communicating on abortion and reproductive rights, and communications staff from all three were part of the Communications team from the outset of the campaign.

A full-time Communications Manager, Amy Rose Harte, was appointed in March 2018 and worked with the Campaign Manager to implement the communications strategy and work with the co-Directors and Executive to monitor progress in relation to each phase of the strategy.

For the Communications Manager to have full strategic overview of a growing system, it was essential to have a robust communications team across traditional press and broadcast management as well as social media.

One of the initial tasks, and challenges was to distil a substantial amount of information into formats that could be used throughout the media. It was important also to select and support spokespeople who would resonate with

audiences. Again here, the cue was taken from the 2016 and 2017 research data that had pointed to doctors and women.

While traditional and digital media have different requirements and to an extent address different audiences, they need to communicate the same messages, albeit in different formats. The campaign drew on the experience of practitioners in both fields. By the end of March, the communications team was in place.

Spokespeople

Spokespeople who would resonate with audiences in many different settings had to be selected, and they needed to be fully supported and briefed on an ongoing basis.

While the voices of women, couples and families were central to the campaign, the role played by doctors was also very significant. Together for Yes approached a small number of doctors and medical personnel to ask them if they would be prepared to speak for the campaign. The Communications Manager and her team worked closely with them, in preparation for radio and TV debates, press conferences, and print media. They were all highly respected members of their profession, and their contributions carried considerable weight in the public arena. They were seen by voters as trustworthy voices of experience and authority.

National and Local Media

Ireland has a significant range of quality local newspapers, and local radio is widespread, attracting consistently high audiences and local media are a vital source of news and views throughout the country. With limited resources, particularly at the beginning, the campaign took time to reach through to regional media. Local groups themselves did much of this work however, and extraordinary spokespeople emerged across the country to speak out in regional media.

The Together for Yes bus tour was organised to run through the last three weeks of the campaign, visiting key towns around the country, which helped bolster local groups and local media. A public meeting with well-known campaign speakers on the platform was held in each town, leaflets were distributed and the speakers typically contributed to local radio talk shows. The bus tour was very effective: it drew attention to the rapidly approaching referendum, gave support and encouragement to local canvassers, opened the issue up to the general public, and generated excellent media opportunities both before and during the visit.

Storylab and Personal Stories

“People wanted the personal stories to set the tone of the debate. It was never going to be mudslinging. We were never going to engage in a war of words because the tone was always set through the personal stories.”

Early in the New Year, members of what would later become the Together for Yes Communications team had begun to set up a ‘Storylab’, which would function as a hub for identifying, gathering and disseminating powerful personal stories. From January 2018, they began reaching out to women and families, and working with them to share their stories.

As the campaign developed, more women and families came forward. Often, those with personal experiences of abortion simply wanted to describe the distress and pain they had been put through because of the Eighth Amendment. Others wanted to ‘put the record straight’, and correct the misrepresentation and misinformation presented by the opposing campaign.

It would be hard to overestimate the impact of personal stories in the campaign, and of their power to move and to persuade voters that the Eighth Amendment needed to be repealed. The crucial value of the personal story approach was later captured in a national exit poll taken on referendum day where ‘personal stories in the media’ emerged as the most influential factor in persuading voters.¹⁷

Television Debates

Several television debates between opposing sides took place during the 10-week referendum campaign proper. Preparing and supporting speakers for these events was a core focus for the Communications Manager and team. The debates were generally quite controversial and at times became heated. Overall, they were contemporaneously seen to galvanise support for the Yes campaign. As anticipated, they were very important, with exit polls showing that a significant number of voters said the debates had impacted on their voting decision. A significant majority of poll-respondents indicated that they believed the Yes side had been more convincing in these debates.¹⁸

17 RTE and Behaviours and Attitudes Exit Poll May 25 2018: <https://www.rte.ie/news/politics/2018/0526/966120-Eighth-Amendment-referendum/>

18 RTE and Behaviours and Attitudes Exit Poll May 25 2018: full exit poll <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2018/05/rte-exit-poll-final-11pm.pdf>

Social Media and Digital Communications

Both the NWCI and ARC had experienced social media teams who were able to bring their knowledge and skills into Together for Yes. The campaign's social media strategy focused on both mobilising its base of supporters, and convincing undecided voters. The social media campaign was particularly effective during the early 'Register to Vote' and the later 'Get Out the Vote' stages.

The campaign used all available social media channels, and had huge reach on both Facebook and Twitter. The website was a key communications tool for the campaign. Video worked well for the campaign across all social media channels, particularly on Facebook. Newspaper articles were among the best performing pieces of content in mid-campaign, before the Together for Yes identity was established. Newspaper articles in the morning were posted to set the agenda for the day. Posting pieces from the Together for Yes website worked with supporters, but had little impact outside of that as people trusted established newspaper sources more, particularly in the early days of the campaign. As with the campaign as a whole, the strongest message carriers on social media were doctors and women and families who had experienced trauma under the Eighth Amendment.

In the closing weeks of the campaign major concerns were raised about online advertising being funded from abroad in support of a No vote.¹⁹ It is important to remember that the referendum was occurring in the aftermath of the USA 2016 Presidential Election, the UK Brexit vote, and the Cambridge Analytica scandal which revealed extensive online personal data-harvesting and micro-targeting of voters on social media. Given the absence of Irish government regulation in the area and the growing extent of public concern, Facebook blocked all advertising relating to the referendum paid for by advertisers outside Ireland. As Google did not have the capabilities to differentiate between foreign and Irish-originated advertising, it blocked all ads relating to the referendum appearing on its platforms. The actions of these social media giants garnered worldwide attention and were seen as an important response to online political manipulation.

¹⁹ The Guardian May 12 2018 Revealed: the overseas anti-abortion activists using Facebook to target Irish voters <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/12/ireland-abortion-campaign-foreign-influence-facebook>

Within the Together For Yes campaign, the response was very measured and importantly related to the impact of campaign messaging, regardless of the medium:

“We knew they, [groups campaigning for a No vote], were going to flood online, but we also knew it wasn’t working. Their posters weren’t working and their digital campaign was the online equivalent of their poster strategy. They were going to pay an enormous amount of money to plaster the internet with the equivalent of their posters. They were still just speaking to their base. It wasn’t effective and we could see that from the canvass returns. Their messaging was simply not converting undecided voters.”

Learning

Establishing credibility: The experience of the Together for Yes Campaign is that it took a great deal of work to become ‘a credible voice’ within the media environment. Establishing this credibility necessitated continuous briefings and sharing of information, pitch-perfect spokespeople, and a willingness to challenge the scripts of media commentators when necessary.

Challenging the media lens: An interesting facet to the media reception of the Together for Yes campaign related to which lens it was reported through. The campaign as a whole was covered by the political media which focussed heavily on the positioning of political parties and individual politicians and on responses from parliamentary bodies and mechanisms. However, in reality the substance of the campaign was much closer to the category of social affairs. This narrowly political media approach proved challenging to the Together for Yes campaign as media commentary was often out of synch with the reality of a social movement and what ultimately turned out to be an extraordinary level of support for the Yes campaign. Journalists often took ‘soundings’ (a sense of what the public was thinking) from politicians who were not themselves engaged in the campaign and were therefore out of touch with the changing public mood.

Holding focus: A key learning from working within this media environment was that despite this pressure to shift focus and respond to political commentary, communications from the campaign remained focused on reaching and persuading undecided voters by providing compelling stories.

Using social media strategically: The social media communication deployed by Together for Yes was strategic, refined and precise, drawing on experience of digital marketing to place materials at certain times of the day, and various other strategic practices. It targeted its audience accurately, focussing particularly undecided voters. Social media was significant throughout, but particularly so in the last phase of implementing *Get Out The Vote* (see Section 9: Mobilisation).

Ensuring consistency: Ensuring consistency between traditional and digital media is important in a fast-paced campaign. It requires close attention in the early phase of establishing campaign operations, and constant connection between digital and traditional communications teams.



3.5 Mobilisation

Mobilisation encouraged and supported people throughout the country to campaign for a Yes vote. Mobilising actions included canvassing door-to-door, running events, organising meetings, putting up stalls in public spaces, or holding awareness-raising banners at roundabouts and bridges, amongst numerous other activities.

The Mobilisation team focussed on strengthening voter engagement and on mobilising campaign support across the country.

It is important to understand the significant layers of local organisers and co-ordinators who organised local meetings, media and canvassing and with whom the mobilisation team worked. The crucial role played by local organisers in growing, galvanising and managing their supporters on the ground cannot be overestimated.

Get Out The Vote

The 'Get Out The Vote' initiative was the final strategic phase of the Together For Yes campaign.

Led by the Mobilisation team, it was a campaign-wide strategy that included communications, social media and the local Together For Yes groups, all of whom worked to support voters to plan ahead for polling day so as to increase turn-out for a Yes vote. Each of the teams in Together for Yes headquarters participated in a strategic planning process for the Get Out The Vote stage.

The 'Make a Plan' aspect of the strategy was launched seven days before voting day. This digital tool sent voters a free reminder text on the morning of the vote. It also allowed them to plan how they would get to the polling station and what time of the day they were going to vote. Supporters were encouraged to sign up for the online reminder.

Together For Yes also created a number of online videos with clear instructions about the voting process, encouraging followers to plan ahead, and to have conversations with their networks.

Finally, visibility canvasses were organised across the country and at key transport hubs in Dublin. These canvasses were designed to show the positivity and momentum of the Yes campaign.

The Canvassing team sat within the Mobilisation team: they liaised with and supported local canvass leads, organised 'super canvasses', and collected and analysed data from canvass returns. Among other tasks, they created three useful online resources: The Canvas Together tool, the Find My Canvas platform, and a dedicated hub for Doctors for Choice and Lawyers for Repeal.

- **The Canvas Together tool:** This was a user-friendly tech-based platform created to track developments at a grassroots level. It enabled the gathering of feedback, monitoring and evaluation of what canvassers were experiencing and finding on the doorstep (See section 13 for details).
- **Find My Canvass:** 'Find My Canvass' was developed to allow supporters to connect instantly and seamlessly with in their local canvassing groups. By inputting their basic information (email, location etc.), new supporters were entered into the database, and passed on to the relevant local manager. By the end of the campaign, this tool had referred upwards of 2,500 volunteers to local groups.
- **Lawyers for Repeal Online Hub:** The Online Hub allowed lawyers to sign up to a petition in support of the Together for Yes campaign to illustrate the volume of support by professionals. This information was extensively used to support the Lawyers For Repeal group which was backed up by the Together for Yes Communications team. The hub consisted of a view-only page with a list of names of signatories, and provided information about their location (county) which fed in to the media strategy.
- **Doctors for Repeal Online Hub:** this hub worked in broadly the same way for doctors and other medical personnel as the Lawyers for Repeal hub.

Managing Mobilisation

The work of mobilising support initially drew on a number of already-existing organisations and networks.²⁰ In addition to some long-standing independent pro-choice groups, from 2012 on the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) had been developing local ARC groups across the country who renamed and relaunched themselves for the campaign as Together for Yes local groups. In early-2018, member organisations of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment and of the National Women's Council also organised to form and join regional and local groups under the Together for Yes banner. Data gathered later would show that many other individuals had not been previously involved in any organisation, and that this was the first time they had campaigned on any issue.

²⁰ In 2016, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment had commissioned research to identify existing pro-choice and pro-repeal local groups and networks across the country (National Mapping Project, Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, 2017). As part of this regional research project, in 2016 and 2017, the Coalition also organised two open 'Regional Networking' workshops to bring diverse regional groups together.

The Mobilisation team was the point of contact between those working on the ground across the country and those operating from headquarters. National coordination was managed through email updates and timetabled weekly meetings using Zoom technology.²¹ The scale of the operation for a small team in headquarters was challenging: managing canvass returns, multiple events, a national tour and a multitude of complex relationships, while working at an increasing pace as events unfolded. The strategy of achieving visibility through ‘claiming public space’ proved to be a significant and positive part of mobilising across the country. Local and regional groups erected stalls on main streets, brought placards to traffic hubs during rush hour, and hung banners from bridges. Combined with the media work and the door-to-door canvassing, a sense of positive movement was created which made the issues public and open for discussion.

“There were so many undecideds – returns saying 30% undecided – and it was so hard to tell what people were going to do. We started doing traffic hubs – we’d bring the banners, homemade stuff and the slick stuff, and we’d go out in the early morning on the N11 road – and it was mind blowing. The support was deafening! It was so loud with the horns beeping in support – it was so emotional – that wasn’t 30% undecideds. It felt like all the hard work was coming together. It felt that we had broken through.”

Learning

Mobilisation Strategy: A coherent ground/mobilisation strategy from the outset is critical – campaigns move fast. The Together for Yes team had clear objectives for its outputs during each of the campaign phases, and each phase aimed to build momentum for the next: at its core, mobilisation is about momentum and pace.

Localising Activity: Localising campaign activity makes a big difference. It is important for mobilising voters directly and for generating local and regional media coverage regionally. This was the rationale for the local canvasses, street stalls, regional launches and the ‘Get Together for Yes’ national bus tour that occurred during the 10-week campaign (March–May 2018).

Coordinating through Technology: Using technology to coordinate phone-in meetings or webinars was particularly useful for the Mobilisation team. It allowed for meetings with activists across the country so as to talk

²¹ Zoom is software which provides remote conferencing services using cloud computing. Zoom offers communications software that combines video conferencing, online meetings, chat, and mobile collaboration <https://www.zoom.us/about>

through the stages of the campaign, discuss localised issues, and work toward the final *Get Out the Vote* phase.

Engaging through Dialogue: Conversations are critical to engaging with and mobilising voters. Together for Yes encouraged conversations and hosted events all across the country. Having personal testimonies at these events was vital to motivating people and growing understanding of the issues.

Aiming for National Mobilisation Cohesion: Taking measures to close the gap between headquarters and local and regional groups is challenging but important. All national campaigns develop a sense of a divide between the headquarters / big city and the ‘on the ground work’, particularly in more rural areas. Learning from Together for Yes shows that while the gap is inevitable certain interventions can help such as:

- Developing training and supports for regional group leaders early on.
- Assigning a named person whose sole function is to support regional groups.
- Developing ‘regional hubs’ and giving them autonomy to support local groups.
- Assigning a person to manage regional media.
- Using technology to keep in touch with regional and local groups – this helps coherence and reduces a sense of isolation.

Canvassing: Traditional ‘on the ground’ campaign methods were immensely important in the Together for Yes campaign. It is evident that regional and local groups were well-organised and developed the capacity to reach people in a very direct and personal way in their locality. They were able to engage in the quiet, reasoned conversations which ultimately moved people to vote Yes.

Encouraging Future Activism and Political Engagement: Local groups have a life beyond the referendum! Post-campaign, a number of local Together for Yes campaign groups have stayed in touch and have moved on to working on other issues, such as migrant rights, disability rights, supporting survivors of domestic abuse, and many other issues.

3.6 Finance, Governance and Fundraising

Finance and Governance

A robust governance, finance and regulatory framework was put in place in the early stages of campaign planning in compliance with the relevant range of regulatory bodies and financial controls.

All donations made to the Together for Yes campaign were vetted for eligibility before acceptance. The three lead organisations also completed an internal compliance audit and put similar systems in place to ensure criteria were met. Systems were set up for local groups to manage donations within the same framework. The campaign maintained a regular channel of communication with the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO), the main regulatory body. While onerous and requiring some donations to be refused, this approach ensured that all media enquiries could be clearly answered, the public were reassured that the campaign was operating with integrity, and all compliance requirements were met.

Fundraising

Together for Yes raised €1.6 million over the 10-week campaign period. Fundraisers included 250 events, and two crowdfunding campaigns, which combined raised over €700,000. This was by far the most money publicly-raised during a referendum campaign in Ireland to date.

There were several strands to the fundraising strategy:

1. Online ask
2. Crowdfunding (x 2)
3. Events (including the Together for Yes concert and run, as well as numerous third-party events hosted for the campaign)
4. Merchandise
5. Telephone ask

The team behind the fundraising strategy had good political knowledge and strong analytical skills, and they had experience from working on previous campaigns, including the Yes Equality referendum in 2015. The combination of this knowledge and connectedness, together with support from the Ask Direct marketing agency, and experienced foresight allowed for the team to ‘hit the ground running’.²² The spread of focus across multiple strands also allowed as many people as possible to contribute and built a sense of momentum.

²² The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment had been working with Ask Direct since early 2017.

Managing the Fundraising Campaign

Across the interviews, focus groups and the online survey carried out to produce this review, people repeatedly named the staggering scale of the Together for Yes first crowdfunding campaign as a key moment, a morale boost, and indeed the point where they often first thought winning was possible.

It was the first major 'ask' from the campaign came on foot of a number of media articles which questioned the campaign's readiness and organisational capacity, and was the first significant temperature gauge of support. It also set the tone for the campaign as a whole, which focused on positive actions and invited people to become involved: to give of their resources and support in whatever way they could.

The success in this area emerged despite a number of significant obstacles. The No campaign began their work earlier and had spent considerable resources on public posterage throughout the country. This gave a sense of a very well-funded operation, which interestingly, itself seemed to motivate people to come out for Together for Yes. As well as resulting in a relatively long campaign, it created a sense in the fundraising team that strategic decisions around timing and energy were being forced on them.

Overall this was an unusually long referendum campaign: A Ministerial Order announcement on 27 March, 2018 effectively was the starting shot for the ten-week campaign-proper. The nature of Together for Yes was that it had to be an entirely new entity without a developed brand recognition, creating a situation where the fundraising team were challenged to be recognised and understood very quickly.

The campaign also needed to be vigilant with regard to the Electoral Act, which significantly governs donations during referendum and other political campaigns. It needed to ensure ongoing compliance with the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPO) which oversees regulation in the area.

Learning

Ensuring Oversight: Robust finance and governance structures must be in place. The often-onerous controls and procedures to finance and govern campaigns require professional oversight to ensure compliance with State regulation.

Centralising Fundraising: Fundraising should be positioned as a key strategic component in campaigns of this scale. Senior people in fundraising should be seen as senior people within the campaign.

Preparing in Advance: Build the fundraising strategy as early as possible. Without resources a campaign cannot function effectively. The availability of resources has systemic affects across all aspects of operations.

Setting up Data Systems: Data management is key to fundraising. Identify the kinds of data required and how to capture it. Working with specialists, design or purchase data management infrastructure to hold one database.

Trusting Volunteers: Campaigns of this scale work primarily because of the volume and passion of committed volunteers: it is important to trust them as you assess capacities. It's also important to create moments for celebration and to boost morale at key moments. The principle is true across all aspects of campaigning team work.

Understanding the Added Value of Fundraising: Beyond resourcing a campaign, success with fundraising activates and galvanises support and provides key morale-boosting moments.

3.7 Politics

The Together for Yes campaign had its roots in the social movement for Repeal that had grown since the tragic death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012. However, it was a campaign for constitutional change which would be followed by legislation. This meant that strengthening, expanding and managing relationships with politicians was always going to be fundamental to its eventual success.

The Context

Over the years, a small number of independent politicians and smaller political parties had worked to highlight the need to resolve the enduring problem of the abortion prohibition. They made legislative proposals, spoke publicly about the issue and insisted that the debate be kept alive in the Oireachtas (houses of parliament). In the meantime, the majority of elected representatives failed to acknowledge the reality of abortion in Ireland and some were vehemently opposed to legislative reform in the area.²³

In this context, it was crucial that a majority of politicians would support calls for repeal of the Eighth Amendment, and then for Government to commit to hold a referendum. Key campaigning organisations had been working on these goals for several years.

The Together for Yes lead organisations had experience of formal lobbying across the party spectrum, as had the Irish Family Planning Association and other key pro-repeal organisations, including Amnesty Ireland, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), Doctors for Choice, Dublin Well Woman Centre, Trade Unions for Repeal, and others. The type and extent of organisations' engagement with the political establishment depended on their particular areas of expertise. Some were 'single issue' organisations (e.g. ARC, the Coalition, other pro-choice groups), while organisations with a broad remit (e.g. the National Women's Council of Ireland), had more multi-layered relationships.

Formal lobbying on the Repeal issue was accelerated in the General Election campaign of 2016, with the focus on encouraging politicians to make a public commitment to a Repeal referendum as a minimum, and beyond that to women's right to choose. ARC rolled out a nation-wide 'Talk to your TD' campaign, and signatures of General Election candidates were gathered by each of the three core Together for Yes organisations, a tactic which bore fruit as approximately 49 TDs elected or re-elected in 2016 made that commitment, with a further 10 TDs already committed through their party's policy.

²³ This is illustrated by the proceedings of the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children public hearings on the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Bill, 2013

The recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly were referred to a Joint Oireachtas Committee (JOC) in the summer of 2017. The JOC reported the following December with a majority decision in favour of a referendum, and proposing the introduction of progressive legislation broadly in line with the Citizens' Assembly recommendations. From January onwards, it was clear that a referendum would be called. On 8 March the Minister for Health, Simon Harris TD, announced the date of the referendum would be 25 May 2018. The Together for Yes referendum campaign was launched two weeks later.

Together For Yes Political Strategy and Tactics

Inevitably, there was a range of political perspectives and affiliations in the campaign and also different views on the role of politicians and politics in campaigning.²⁴ However, the campaign defined its role as one of encouraging and supporting politicians to speak out on the issue in favour of a Yes vote. As with most cross-cutting social issues, achieving a degree of unity across a widely diverse political spectrum was a central challenge the campaign had to deal with.

Basic political ground rules identified by Together for Yes were:

- Agreement that Together for Yes was a grassroots, independent, primarily civil society campaign.
- Engagement with politicians would be even-handed and resolutely cross-party.
- Politicians would not be invited to speak on Together for Yes national or media platforms.
- Support from politicians was welcome and essential, but politicians could not speak for Together for Yes.

For a referendum to come about it must be called by the Government with the support of a parliamentary majority. It was therefore expected that media would be inclined to call on political figures for analysis and comment on the campaign. This posed challenges for Together for Yes to maintain its essential neutral position *vis-a-vis* pro-repeal political parties.

The campaign did not include politicians on national platforms, but was flexible when it came to local meetings. Many local groups around the country pointed out that the presence of supportive local political representatives at their events helped to raise issue-visibility and to significantly amplify campaign messages.

24 This was particularly the case for the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment whose membership crossed a broad political and ideological spectrum. Ultimately, following challenging discussion, Coalition members had agreed to be part of Together for Yes and to follow campaign strategy and messaging. The issue continued to be raised and discussed at Coalition, Together for Yes Platform and Regional/Local Group meetings during the campaign.

To achieve effective and ongoing communication with key political actors – parties and individuals – the Together for Yes co-Directors, Campaign Manager and Political Coordinator had regular formal meetings with individual politicians, political parties' General Secretaries and with their campaign coordinators.

Local groups often reported that managing tensions between members of different political parties within a group was time-consuming, stressful, and sometimes difficult, while at the national level political engagement appeared generally less fractious.

Learning

Setting Ground Rules: In campaigns of this scale there will be inevitable differences of opinion and perspective on engagement with politicians. Managing different viewpoints requires time and patience, while setting clear ground rules from the start for the positioning of politicians vis a vis the campaign significantly helps to alleviate this.

Accommodating Positions: It is significant to note that some politicians and political parties had campaigned to repeal the Eighth Amendment for many years, while others were newer to the issue. It is crucial for a national campaign on a single issue to 'create a big enough tent' to hold all positions broadly in line with campaign objectives. It is a testament to the skill of Together For Yes that it created a big enough tent for all to work in.

Providing Unique Opportunities: The referendum campaign provided politicians with an opportunity to collaborate directly with grassroots activism. Many activists spoke about how the campaign and the impending polling date focused all minds on the need to work together.

Managing Distance: Maintaining Together for Yes as a civil society campaign meant that the leadership needed to maintain a certain distance from politicians and to manage and balance those relationships.

3.8 The Together for Yes Platform

Set up at the start of the campaign, the purpose of the Together for Yes Platform was to bring together a wide diversity of civil society organisations in favour of repealing the Eighth Amendment.²⁵ The Platform aimed to reach out to organisations that had not been involved in the Repeal campaign so far and that could:

- speak for the middle ground.
- make the campaign visible in their own organisational work.
- be visible in the campaign.

Platform members in their diversity became visible in the media, including social media, and they also supported the canvassing and mobilisation efforts. A series of short videos were made where platform members voiced their organisation's support. This presented the message that disability organisations, human rights groups, medical groups, trade unions and many others were all coming together to achieve a Yes vote.

Learning

Creating vehicles for engagement: It is important in cross-sectoral work to provide vehicles that others can engage with to the degree appropriate to them. That Together for Yes was framed as a broad civil society alliance creating a platform that welcomed a wide variety of organisation to join was in keeping with the campaign's positioning.

Networking: Working with organisations who themselves are platforms with wide networks is a real advantage as it extends immeasurably the campaign's reach and capacity. This was the case with each of the three lead organisations in Together for Yes.

²⁵ As well as attracting new organisations, the Platform included the 100+ member organisations of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, the Abortion Rights Campaign individual and local area member groups, and the National Women's Council.

3.9. Merchandising

The Together for Yes merchandise contributed very importantly to creating a community of Repeal supporters. Many people spoke about how the visibility of campaign badges, T-shirts and jumpers helped foster a sense of solidarity and of security and inclusivity, and they reflected on how this kind of visibility motivated them to campaign.

From the outset, the campaign received numerous requests for merchandise. The merchandise aimed to serve two main purposes:

- Build issue-awareness and visibility.
- Collect donations for the campaign.

Production and distribution of merchandise requires effective distribution system with early investment and planning to ensure availability of stock when required. Online orders were made through the Woo Commerce programme via the Together for Yes website. A small team of volunteers in headquarters worked on production and the distribution of merchandise to local groups, while a huge team of volunteers, coordinated through an online scheduling system, packed online shop orders. The majority of stock sent to local groups was for the purpose of awareness-building, providing people with the supplies to demonstrate their support, and was given away for free to canvassers or at street stalls and meetings. Merchandise was also required for fundraising events.

Full time and pop-up shops were also very useful venues for the public to make direct contact with the campaign, as well as to purchase items. Certain initiatives (such as Uterus Prime) and art installations (such as Everyday Stories) were also hosted in the shops. The first pop-up space in Dublin's city centre opened in mid-April. There were further pop-ups in Galway, Cork, Limerick and Newbridge. Images of people queuing outside pop-up shops to buy Repeal jumpers were used in the media as an indication of the growing support for a Yes vote. They also visibly highlighted that this was a campaign that engaged huge numbers of young people.

Learning

Adding Value: Providing campaign merchandise can be an important part of developing a sense of community and momentum. Merchandise generates income, but just as importantly it promotes issue and campaign visibility and invites dialogue.

Meeting Logistical Challenges: The logistical organisation for producing and distributing merchandise requires specific expertise and resourcing particularly in the short time frame of a referendum campaign.

3.10 Monitoring progress

The primary functions of campaign monitoring are to analyse whether a strategy is working, if or where changes are needed, and to ensure that the campaign is maximising its resources towards achieving its goal. A related and essential function is to reassure campaigners, to steady nerves and to keep teams focused.

To monitor campaign progress, Together for Yes developed a multi-layered tracking system. In a campaign of the scale of Together for Yes when so much was at stake and where the issues being debated were so personal, this ongoing analysis was particularly relevant. The importance of this ongoing monitoring, particularly at the height of the campaign when the pace was break-neck, cannot be over-emphasised.

Monitoring Tool for Campaign Management

Built by volunteers, the monitoring system has been referred to variously as the ‘dashboard’ or the ‘screens’, or the ‘air traffic controller’ by people who were doing this work.

Different members of the various teams could watch and track different ‘screens’ or areas of work, while the Campaign Manager could access to all of them. When combined this monitoring tool was made up of six information sources:

1. Canvassing returns
2. Public opinion polls
3. Insights from strategic advisors
4. Media monitoring
5. Internal campaign communications and structures
6. Fundraising

The understanding that the leadership and senior management were working to was that if anything was going wrong it would show up on one or more of the screens, and if there was an evidence-based reason for changing course, then a change would be considered.

“Every morning I’d look at ‘Canvass Together,’ go into media monitor, check Slack [the software system] for internal communications, looking for any red flags.”

Monitoring the Canvass: The Canvass Together tool

“We wanted the figures from canvassing returns to empower the leaders with information they needed to make brave decisions.”

The aim of Canvass Together was to provide feedback from canvassing to the campaign with information that was ‘useful, relevant and timely’ on a local and national level.

The Canvass Together tool allowed monitoring and evaluation of developments at a grassroots level. Some seasoned campaigners on the team described this tool as ‘frightening’ due its reach and the level of detail it gathered.

Participating canvassers filled in a simple hardcopy sheet each evening recording their activity. They also gathered sentiment such as strength of opinion and key arguments encountered. These sheets were gathered by local Team Leads and sent to trained Together for Yes constituency volunteers who input the feedback. Through this process thousands of responses were gathered each evening which allowed for the production of detailed reports in headquarters. The tool also allowed the campaign to monitor selected towns and areas.

A ‘head-to-head’ view was created to summarise the expected outcome. This view divided up the Maybe votes between Yes and No using a ratio method, with a working assumption to err on the side of ‘Maybe’ respondents leaning towards a No vote by 80%. This was tracked for week-on-week changes.

Further, the tool recorded shifts in messaging from the No side, and whether these messages were holding or not. It also allowed the campaign to see that the figures for No stayed flat throughout the campaign, and when the Maybe cohorts started to shift in the final weeks the campaign could clearly see they were moving towards a Yes vote.

“It let us react to the voter rather than the opposition.”

Every morning the Campaign Manager reviewed the Canvass Together report from the night before, and the reports were reviewed by the co-Directors and discussed at Executive and Strategic Advisory Group meetings. In the closing weeks of the campaign the numbers of potential voters being captured by this system were large enough to give the campaign leaders confidence and assurance.

The Canvass Together tool forecast the referendum outcome to within 3% of the final result.

“The figures coming in, even though we didn’t believe them, were an emotional anchor.”

Learning

Tailoring the Monitoring Tools: The Canvass Together tool could be easily adapted for other electoral campaigns. It serves to provide organisers with an accurate record of the feeling on the ground, something which is invaluable for directing messaging and adjusting the detail of strategy implantation through the next stage of the campaign. It allows campaign managers to fully see whether or how their messaging is connecting with the chosen target.

Monitoring Public Opinion Polls

The most robust indicators of progress for Together for Yes were the independent public opinion polls carried out for various media sources throughout the campaign. They were few and far between in early-2018, but during the 10-week referendum campaign period, there were at least two national opinion polls each week.²⁶

Understanding the nuances behind the headline figures of the polls was important for drawing out conclusions for action. The analysts were looking for what was working and what wasn't. For instance, they agreed that pitching emotive and personal stories was effective. They also indicated that the biggest vulnerability was the risk of relying exclusively on the younger vote, a demographic historically less likely to turn out. . As with the Yes Equality referendum in 2015, this wasn't the case in actuality: on referendum day young people voted in large numbers. The analysis, however, was valuable and highlighted the fact that the campaign needed to redouble its efforts with older audiences to ensure the Yes vote would be carried.

Insights on Monitoring from Strategic Advisors

Structurally the Strategic Advisory Group provided expert independent advice and insights to the campaign. Less formally the three co-Directors and the Campaign Manager sought input from trusted advisors, whom they knew to have experience and expertise in specific areas: they referred to these people as “touchstones” and “confidants”. One co-Director describes “a handful of people whose opinion I'd ask for on issues where I knew they knew their stuff”, and importantly where she felt they would be frank.

Monitoring Media

A core function of the Communications Manager and her team was to monitor the media for progress and risk. The campaign used the media monitoring software 'Meltwater' which searched a given day for coverage, key words and terms. Each morning the team would review a report from this software,

²⁶ Typically commissioned by major daily or weekend newspapers

including what it captured regarding the previous and forthcoming days coverage of the referendum.

Indeed, towards the end of the campaign the team had become so attuned to the messaging that they could identify small changes in the No side's message by quickly reviewing this system.

Analysing Language and Messaging in the Media

A key element of monitoring progress through the media was the ability of the Communications team to analyse the language and messaging being used by media outlets – sometimes referred to as the media 'internalising' campaign messages.

The Communications Manager noted that such impact was evident on numerous occasions. This included newspaper headlines using more moderate language and radio features centring around core campaign concepts: for example, the widespread and everyday reality of abortion pills.

“A key indicator for me was on a debate – he was using our language, that's when you know that you're penetrating the consciousness of the broadcasters and key influencers.”

Monitoring Internal Campaign Processes and Structures

The campaign structure and processes also provided key opportunities for progress to be monitored. The daily ongoing contact between the three co-Directors allowed them to share information and was a crucial element in their system of maintaining oversight. In addition, at meetings of the campaign Executive, the sharing of reports and the processes of decision-making were also part of the process of monitoring progress and allowing members to maintain an overview.

Within the headquarters team, campaign meetings happened initially weekly, then bi-weekly, then daily. At these meetings team members could see how the various areas of the campaign were working and hear and share progress and concerns. The Campaign Manager and Team-Leads met separately either once or twice a week to discuss issues as they arose, and to measure progress against work plans.

The full campaign team used the messaging and collaboration system 'Slack'. This allowed team members to work together remotely, and it also provided a central platform for communications, and to be alert to 'red flags' raised by colleagues.

Monitoring Fundraising

Perhaps one of the simplest monitoring practices that the Together for Yes engaged in was monitoring fundraising in general, and specifically the crowd-funding efforts. The scale of fundraising support online and in the purchase of merchandise was an ongoing indicator of popular support, and subsequently boosted the confidence of the campaigners themselves.

Learning

Developing ‘Dashboards’: Developing a ‘dashboard’ to monitor progress can both alleviate stress and motivate campaigners if the information that it presents is selected and prioritised correctly. Such a resource can provide clarity and evidence on how well, or poorly, the campaign is performing, and can be shared with campaign personnel before a version, or lens on the data, goes to media.

Managing ‘Negativity Bias’: “Even in a very well-run campaign, when the machine is humming, people can begin to panic”: even with, but particularly without, robust monitoring a campaign must watch for ‘negativity bias’, or the sense of being overwhelmed by opposition messaging or presence. A key function of monitoring is to help reflect the actuality and to have a sobering and steadying effect.



Part 4: Summary Overviews

4.1 Campaign Milestones

Four key moments or ‘milestone’ themes repeatedly emerged in the process of carrying out this review.

Crowdfunding: The Scale of Support for Fundraising

The sheer scale and velocity of donations to the initial crowdfunding campaign was mentioned by almost everyone as a uniquely empowering early milestone. For many it created a sense of ownership because they had literally ‘bought into’ the campaign through their financial donation. Many donors left personal messages online dedicating their donation to someone who had suffered as a result of the Eighth Amendment or thanking campaigners for their work. It sent a very clear message to the public that there was a movement here that they could be part of. The fund reached its target and massively surpassed it within days of its launch.

The tangible effects were also cited as a milestone for many: with the funds came the first Yes posters, and merchandise. The visibility of fellow campaigners on public transport and on the street provided a sense of quiet solidarity that for many was a huge if unquantifiable milestone in itself.

Canvassing and Traffic Hubs

Although many found facing strangers on their front-doorstep very challenging, for a large number of canvassers the opportunity to have open conversations with the people in their community was a very positive milestone. The experience of connecting with others, the opportunity to engage with people who a canvasser might never speak with in everyday life was mentioned repeatedly.

The feel-good factor in a campaign where very difficult issues were being debated, was often hard to maintain, but it was boosted by acts of ‘guerrilla canvassing’ which took place at traffic hubs and bridges throughout the country. Local groups took home-made banners to central locations and canvassed passing traffic. The responses to these endeavours were hugely positive: one respondent described the sound of passing cars blowing their horns in support as “a deafening cacophony of solidarity”.

Television Debates

The TV debates were named as milestones by everyone. One of the early debates, which was considered to have been ‘won’ by the No campaign by some distance, had an important impact on the Yes side’s mobilisation efforts: pro-Repeal people around the country understood the ‘no holds barred’ nature of the opposition’s campaign and were galvanised to take action by donating to Together for Yes and/or joining a local mobilisation group. Later debates showed

the strength of the evidence and experience based Yes campaign messages and the failure of the opposition to respond effectively to the Yes side's argument or to accurately sense the mood of the electorate.

Solidarity

When asked to name milestones other than a specific event, many people mentioned the feelings of solidarity that grew across communities, ages, genders and personal beliefs from the start of the campaign in March to its successful conclusion in May 2018.

From the hugely significant public declaration of solidarity provided by the speed and scale of the crowdfunding campaign, to the simple act of connecting with a stranger wearing a 'Repeal' jumper, and thousands of other overt and subtle signs of acceptance, the campaign had a profound impact on those involved. The visibility of an enormous groundswell of young women and large numbers of young men joining the tireless activists who had spent years laying the foundations of this campaign speaks to an important social continuum of activism honoured - and bearing results.



4.2 Challenges

A number of challenging issues emerged in the course of the campaign, some of them already mentioned throughout this Review. Here these challenges are gathered and observed in their cumulative effect to illustrate the kinds of co-existing pressures a campaign is likely to face.

Pace

The pace of the campaign meant that the structures of the various teams within Together for Yes had to be created ‘on the fly’. Each team – perhaps inevitably – felt that they were under pressure and would have benefited from more volunteers, to assist the smooth delivery of the major phases of the campaign.

The fast pace and constantly evolving nature of the campaign made speedy decision-making essential. Some volunteers expressed the view that the campaign leadership and governance structure slowed things down at times, making it difficult to make ‘on the spot’ decisions. At the same time, the relatively open structure, with an emphasis on information-sharing meant that teams and individuals did not generally feel ‘left out of the loop’.

Lack of Respect for Female Leadership

“We kept hitting these monumental milestones, like the crowdfunding, and the Olympia gig, the queues for merchandise, and because it was outside of a political party or because it was run by women, take your pick, it wasn’t really noticed, or given attention.”

There was a strong sense that elements of the media and political establishment did not show respect for women in leadership. Some political media commentary suggested that the campaign had no clear leadership or organisation. This was despite the fact that the three women co-Directors had established records as leaders and organisers, as had the senior management and the team leads. In fact, the headquarters personnel were some of the most experienced referendum campaigners in the country.

Many of the survey respondents mentioned ‘mansplaining’: how as women they experienced men telling them how to do their job, and this persisted throughout the campaign. From the on-street stalls, and door-to-door canvass, to personal conversations with friends, family and acquaintances, this women-led campaign reported they had to contend with a ‘men know better’ attitude continuously.

Message Discipline

The major focus of the campaign strategy was to encourage people who were undecided to vote Yes. Research showed that women's need for reproductive health carries more positive resonance to middle-ground voters than women's *right to choose*. For many campaigners who had worked for years on the basis that access to abortion was a human right and was the choice of each woman, this was a difficult compromise.

Some also felt that the campaign relied too heavily on what the No campaign called the 'hard cases' of pregnancy as a result of rape or a diagnosis of fatal foetal anomaly.²⁷ When the personal stories of women and families from the 'Storylab' project of the campaign are examined, approximately half of the stories represent these circumstances with the other 50% addressing a range of different circumstances.

These were ongoing concerns for the campaign leadership, but ultimately, in line with all the research, holding a disciplined message that reached out to undecided voters proved to be the most effective course of action for this campaign.

Marginalised Voices

The campaign's primary focus was on the middle ground, seeking to reassure 'soft yes' voters and to persuade 'soft no' voters to vote Yes. Campaign communications were informed by research and relied on very short and simple messages that would resonate with the maximum target audience and be delivered through print advertising, leaflets, posters and social media. Inevitably, these communications could not fully reflect the diversity and nuance that well-informed campaigners understood to be critical to issues of reproductive rights and bodily autonomy.

Aware that a mass volunteer campaign would be dominated by mainstream voices, the Platform was built in to the campaign structure to create a space for diverse communities and organisations to form a core part of the campaign while at the same time creating space to speak to their specific issues. Through the Platform, organisations were supported to lead on their own referendum activities and to participate in general campaign events.

²⁷ That is, highlighting cases where abortion was necessary because of a fatal foetal abnormality or where a woman's health was seriously at risk.

Urban-Rural Divide

Issues relating to the urban-rural divide and about 'headquarters versus on-the ground' emerged in the online survey and in the focus group session with members of regional groups carried out for this review. Some people from rural areas reported they were left without posters for long periods of time, requiring some campaigners to set up creative hubs, where local members gathered to print and hand-paint their own posters.

The growth of a huge on-the-ground campaign and limited resources in the mobilisation team fed this feeling of isolation with local groups feeling that no one was responding to their queries and needs. Inevitably, this led at times to strained relationships as each tried to do their best in fast-moving circumstances.

It was not possible at the start to predict the sheer scale and number of people who would come out to canvass and mobilise across the country. With hindsight, it is clear that the Mobilisation team would have benefited from having more full-time staff. In particular, it needed team members who would focus solely on:

- Event management
- Regional media
- Relationship management with local and regional groups



The No Campaign, and the Need for ‘Balance’

The early appearance of No campaign posters, with images and messages which were offensive and upsetting invoked reactions of anger, fear and stress for Yes campaigners across the country. The sheer volume of these posters, together with beer mats and billboards, revealed that the No campaign had accumulated rich resources and that the Yes campaign would be out-spent.

In addition, the requirement of broadcasters to ensure a ‘50/50’ time and speaker balance between both sides of the campaign meant that people were subjected to opinions that they found upsetting and offensive. The majority of the No campaign maintained a hard line of ‘no abortion for any reason’ which meant that women who had had abortions were exposed to offensive material on a daily basis.

Canvassing on such a Personal Issue

The challenges of working on the ground were numerous. The very act of canvassing – knocking on doors and speaking with strangers about issues which are both personal and highly stigmatised – was difficult; many had negative experiences, and women in particular experienced some direct and vitriolic misogyny. Peer support was vitally important and many would like it to have been stronger.



4.3 Key Learning from the campaign

Build Coalitions

Three organisations formed Together for Yes to lead the referendum campaign. Each had worked on bringing together people and organisations with diverse perspectives on how to advance abortion in Ireland, and also had previous experience of working with each other. In developing large-scale campaigns there can be real challenges in conceding ground and strategically compromising where necessary, which makes the work of coalition-building all the more important. Successful campaigns tend to create a ‘broad church’ where diverse groups can coexist and share messaging, while foregrounding their individual perspective and voice. They are focused on specific outcomes over a limited time period. This common focus to a shared end-goal is vital.

Build Strategy Early, Test it, then Stick to it

It is vital that early on in preparation for a campaign, dedicated attention is invested in designing and testing the proposed campaign strategy. A strategy built on the basis of sound messaging research needs time to be tested and to gather input from experienced campaigners.

Build the Evidence-Base Early

Early preparation is foundational to successful public campaigning. Relevant evidence should be used as the backbone of a campaign’s strategic development. This can include research that demonstrates the need for change, and the harm that the status quo is causing, as well as the effectiveness of campaign proposals.

Such evidence should build an understanding of public sentiment on the issue. When working to move public opinion on social issues, it is vital to understand the concerns of those who do not readily or easily accept your assumptions or arguments. Careful thought needs to be given to what messages and actions can speak for this cohort. It is also important to develop and test messaging with this group early, as this may become the core messaging of the campaign.

Understand where People are Listening from and Build Communications to Reach them.

In order to reach and move people, a clear understanding of where people are listening *from* (their perspective) is required. A successful public campaign does not take the approach of trying to win a debate or ‘be the smartest person in the room’. Key to the success of Together for Yes was the fact that it didn’t set out to tell people what to do or think, but rather it set out to express the majority’s wish for change using their own words and values.

By building a campaign based on understanding where *voters* are listening from, rather than on where *organisers* are speaking from, it is also possible to adapt nuanced messages that reach, resonate and ‘land’ with people. It is not possible to develop effective campaign messaging without the ability to understand where people are coming from, and their concerns.

No matter how much money is put into posters or online ads, if the message isn’t right, it will not work. This is a first-principle reality of campaigning and places a great deal of importance on message testing.

Build and Empower a Strong Activist Base

Delivery of messaging through the media and advertising will always be limited. It is necessary to meet voters in their local communities and create space for dialogue. In addition, local campaigners send a powerful message about the importance of the issue in the day to day lives of the ordinary voter. Large scale local mobilisation cannot be coordinated from a headquarters. It requires organisers who can link their groups in to a centralised campaign machinery. The development of a geographically dispersed network of local activists and organisers takes time and investment to build skills and retain volunteers.

In a fast-paced, intense and often stressful campaign environment, strong pre-existing personal relationships and organising history help to build trust between the local and national campaign and to resolve issues as they arise.

Create Safe Spaces to Engage with People not Aligned to either side of the Issue

It is important for campaigns on issues that are very personal, have deep histories and which are seen as ‘divisive’, to provide space for safe conversations. This can include small group work independently facilitated and focused on information and discussion. This empowers people who haven’t engaged on the topic before to do so in a comfortable manner which in turn allows them to develop and evidence based informed opinion.

The strategy also needs to be made actionable. Core to the success of Together for Yes was the ability of the headquarters team to take an overarching strategy and to ‘drill down into it’ so as to create detailed implementation plans for the various work areas. This work needs time, space and support to be developed.

Choose Spokespeople Based on Research, and Support Them

In the selection of spokespeople for a major social change campaign, the importance of using language, pitch and message in ways the target audience can relate to cannot be overstated. Often, these spokespeople may not be those who have led on the issue or campaigned for years. Together for Yes made a decision to ensure that women and couples who had suffered as a consequence of the 8th Amendment, along with doctors and medical professionals, were heard because voters trusted these two groups and needed to hear their expert opinion.

Whether experienced with media or not, it is important to support spokespeople through media training, and to maintain ongoing contact (pre- and post-appearance). It is also key that spokespeople, regardless of their expertise, are aligned with the campaign messages, including the messages relevant to specific moments within the campaign. In this way campaigns that welcome expert spokespeople can present a coherent and consistent message throughout the life of that campaign.

A Strategy is only as Good as the People who Deliver it

Major campaigns need highly-skilled, strategically-minded people to deliver them. The skills involved include the ability to project plan and manage, to build teams, to reflect and re-evaluate approaches rapidly, to align with decision-making processes, to prioritise, to develop deep understandings of the issues, and to remain focused on the end goal.

Establish Credibility

The external credibility of the campaign is important. When setting up a new campaign, test everything through a 'credibility filter'. This includes checking:

- Do you have an evidence base?
- Are you speaking as part of a community affected by the issues?
- Is your strategy coherent and consistent?
- Can you demonstrate the ability to adapt?
- Can you negotiate access to decision makers?
- Can you gather relevant experts and trusted voices and engage them in the campaign as spokespeople

Build an Agreed System for Monitoring Progress

The use and efficiency of such ongoing monitoring, particularly at the height of the campaign when the pace is breakneck, cannot be over-emphasised.

The primary function of campaign monitoring is to analyse whether the strategy is working, if changes are needed and to ensure that the campaign is maximising its resources towards achieving its goal of winning. A related function is also to reassure campaigners, steady nerves and keep teams focused.

Together For Yes created a campaign monitoring system that is in fact applicable to many other social change campaigns.

No Two Campaigns are the Same: social and historical context are everything

This became very apparent in the development of the Together for Yes campaign. Although organisers learned a great deal from previous campaigns, including the 2015 marriage equality campaign, the degree of polarisation and bitterness as seen in previous abortion campaigns, misogynistic attitudes towards women, and the profound secrecy and stigma surrounding abortion in Ireland made the work of delivering a successful strategy a very different proposition and therefore a very different campaign. While drawing on the lessons learned previously, Together for Yes needed to recognise the differences and to strategise accordingly.

Where other jurisdictions are concerned, it is vital to take into account the particular history and context in which the campaign effort is operating in. Indeed, in this 2018 Irish referendum it is clear that the 'pro-life' messages and approaches developed in the United States and used during this campaign in Ireland, failed to resonate with Irish voters.





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Appendix 1

Together for Yes Survey Summary

As part of the research to develop this learning resource a survey of Yes campaigners was carried. The following is a brief overview of findings.

Number of Respondents – 351

Majority of respondents were:

- Female (79%)
- Heterosexual (71%)
- White Irish (90%)
- 27% were located in Dublin. Of the 3351 respondents only 12 were based outside Ireland For 35 % of respondents this was their first campaign.
- Many respondents came to their involvement with Together for Yes through membership of the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment or through their involvement with ARC and / or membership of a local group.
- 52% of respondents took part in canvassing groups, with many respondents being involved in many areas of the campaign on a grassroots level, from organising rallies, transport, street stalls, and chairing local and national meetings.
- 85% of respondents stated it was easy/very easy to access information about Together for Yes, especially if you had internet access.
- Some respondents felt that local groups were isolated from the national campaign.
- 86% said Facebook was an invaluable tool, along with 65% using twitter as a means of gathering and sharing information.

When asked about their level of involvement the results are as shown below

Complete immersion in the campaign	42.86%	150
Very Involved	32.29%	113
Involved	17.43%	61
Involved from time to time	7.43%	26

There was much crossover in how respondents participated in the Together for Yes campaign, with

- 89% having personal conversations.
- 86% Canvassing.
- 85% using social media.

- 59% taking part in demonstrations.
- 58% campaigning as part of a member organisation.

Respondents did everything from driving people to meetings, car-pooling, poster-ing, leaflet distribution, letter writing, leading local and national groups, setting up social media campaigns, participating in media debates and discussions, manning street stalls, and creating art for the campaign.

How useful were supports and training from Together for Yes?

- 23% – Extremely useful
- 39% – Very useful
- 25% – Somewhat useful
- 6% – Not useful at all

Others said that they didn't receive any specific training, but relied on their peers for support and advice, namely on the door to door canvassing.

What, if any, challenges did you face during the Together for Yes campaign?

From the 303 respondents to this question, there were a variety of challenges that occurred across the campaign. The most notable is the abuse canvassers received from the opposing side. The very act of canvassing itself was a challenge to many, as well as the No campaigns tactics being very upsetting.

A substantial number of respondents addressed the lack of posters for rural campaigners.

Issues such as funding, transport and childcare as well as campaign fatigue and stress come up a number of times, as do the personal relationships within families with opposing views. Mental health, and health in general were something a number of respondents felt were affected throughout their involvement in the campaign.

Highlights and Milestones

- The landslide win.
- Television debates, particularly Minister Simon Harris
- The solidarity people found during the campaign, while canvassing.
- Personal stories.
- The crowdfunding campaign
- *In Her Shoes*²⁸ – an online platform created for women to share their personal stories of how the Eighth Amendment had affected them.

28 <https://www.facebook.com/InHerIrishShoes/>

- Personal empowerment
- Formation of Together for Yes

The most significant and oft-mentioned highlight of the campaign was the hugely successful crowdfunding campaign. The televised debates and the sheer numbers of people joining the canvas trail gave people a huge lift of encouragement.

What lessons do you feel you took away from your involvement with the Together for Yes campaign that you would apply to future campaigning?

Below is a sampling of answers to this question.

‘Collaboration can work.’

‘I would 100% join a campaign in the future. I learned that hard work can pay off, you can change attitudes with facts and personal experiences, that on a campaign (especially if you’ve been on it for a long time) self-care is really important and that that sense of achievement makes all the tough days worth it.’

‘Communication is key (internal and external)’

‘Social media management, clear messaging, inviting and welcoming messaging, understanding and communication of those we disagreed with.’

‘Emphasis on providing respite and help with emotional and mental health.’

‘Together people are strong and powerful.’

‘That while people have different views/opinions we can have a common goal.’

‘I took away a lot about canvassing and also the inner workings of a group like Offaly Together for Yes and the time and dedication it takes. It made me want to be more involved in the future.’

‘Anything is possible with enough confidence and support.’

‘Prepare early; delegate; book counselling sessions in advance.’

‘That we are all in it together, working towards the same end result. The people in HQ are not the enemy but are also volunteers doing their very best– showing kindness and appreciation to people making the campaign happen doesn’t cost a penny and I would be much more thoughtful in the future. And women-led campaigns do work!’

‘To make sure everyone has a voice in the campaign. You don’t realise the ways different groups in society can be affected by these things until you listen, and it’s important we give people a platform to share their perspectives so that we have the whole picture.’

Over 94% of respondents said that they would be likely or very likely to take part in any future campaign based on their experience during the Together for Yes campaign.

Appendix 2

The Together For Yes Team

Campaign Co-Directors

Grainne Griffin: Abortion Rights Campaign

Orla O'Connor: National Women's Council of Ireland

Ailbhe Smyth: Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment

Campaign Executive

Abortion Rights Campaign: Grainne Griffin; Sarah Monaghan;

Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment: Ailbhe Smyth; Sinead Kennedy;

Irish Family Planning Association: Niall Behan; Maeve Taylor;

National Women's Council of Ireland: Orla O'Connor; Silke Paasche.

Campaign Manager

Deirdre Duffy

Department Leads (Team Leads)

Amy Rose Harte, Communications

Finance and Governance, Suzanne Handley

Denise Charlton, Fundraising

Silke Paasche, Production

Sarah Monaghan, Merchandising

Sinéad Kennedy, Evidence, Data and Risk (Research and Rebuttals)

Suzanne Handley, Governance and Compliance

Alison Spillane, Political Liaison

Eilis Ni Chaithnia, Platform

Laura Harmon, Mobilisation

Annie Hoey, Canvassing

Linda Kavanagh, Website

Peter Tanham, Digital

Sarah Clarkin, Social Media

Orla Howard, Advertising media

Research and Messaging Development

Adam May

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Appendix 3

Citizen's Assembly Recommendations on the Eighth Amendment June 2017

In summary, the Assembly recommended by a majority vote the following:

Ballot 1: That Article 40.3.3° should not be retained in full (87%).

Ballot 2: That Article 40.3.3° should be replaced or amended (56%).

Ballot 3: That Article 40.3.3° should be replaced with a constitutional provision that explicitly authorises the Oireachtas to legislate to address termination of pregnancy, any rights of the unborn, and any rights of the pregnant woman (57%).

The Assembly then made further recommendations about what should be included in this legislation. Specifically, the reasons, if any, for which termination of pregnancy should be lawful in Ireland, as well as any gestational limits that should apply were addressed. As will be explained later, Ballot 4A and Ballot 4C were redundant at this stage.

On the final reason voted on in that Ballot, 64% of the Members recommended that the termination of pregnancy without restriction should be lawful. In addition, a majority of Members recommended 12 reasons, for which termination of pregnancy should be lawful in Ireland. They also made recommendations as to gestational limits, if any, in respect of each of those reasons. Those reasons are as follows and the details of the voting on gestational limits, if any, for each will be outlined later:

1. Real and substantial physical risk to the life of the woman (99%)
2. Real and substantial risk to the life of the woman by suicide (95%)
3. Serious risk to the physical health of the woman (93%)
4. Serious risk to the mental health of the woman (90%)
5. Serious risk to the health of the woman (91%)
6. Risk to the physical health of the woman (79%)
7. Risk to the mental health of the woman (78%)
8. Risk to the health of the woman (78%)
9. Pregnancy as result of rape (89%)

10. The unborn child has a foetal abnormality that is likely to result in death before or shortly after birth (89%)
11. The unborn child has a significant foetal abnormality that is not likely to result in death before or shortly after birth (80%)
12. Socio-economic reasons (72%)

Appendix 4

Together for Yes Campaign Strategy

The goal of the Together for Yes campaign is to win a Yes majority vote in the referendum scheduled for 25 May 2018.

We know from research that most people want to remove the Eighth Amendment and to talk about it calmly. But it has been a divisive and emotive issue for decades, and many are confused and still have concerns, especially if they are not connected through personal experience.

Our objectives are to:

- Lead, mobilise and co-ordinate Yes vote activity across the country, working closely with allied independent campaigns.
- Focus our activity on engaging the ‘concerned centre’ with soft voters as our main target.
- Inform, persuade and reassure our target ‘concerned centre’ audience
- Strongly motivate and support our base to campaign actively and to mobilise Yes voters.
- Champion the Yes position with compelling, moving personal stories
- Put forward robust fact and evidence-based arguments to counter scaremongering and misinformation

The Campaign will have three phases

Phase 1. Inform, Engage (Launch – end April) (68 days out)

- We will focus on engaging with voters about:
 - why removing the Eighth matters
 - informing and reassuring them about the legislative proposals
 - building trust and confidence in our campaign
 - encouraging them to engage openly with the issue, with their families, friends and neighbours; in their colleges and workplaces, and in their communities.
- Achieve regional reach and visibility through ‘Together for Yes’ launches and small-scale local events (e.g., coffee mornings; community meetings; social and sporting events)
- Engage with our Platform partners to hold sector-specific ‘Get Togethers for Yes’ and to develop Together for Yes social media presence

- Hone the nation-wide canvassing operation; analyse 'doorsteps' responses and refine messaging
- Create platform for compelling stories about personal experiences (women, couples, parents) via national and especially regional media, and is small-scale local 'Get Togethers'
- Promote positive messages for Yes via high-functioning strategic comms (classic, social and digital media platforms), and systematically counteract misinformation.

Phase 2. Persuade, Motivate (Early – mid May) (25 days out)

- Intensive nationwide canvassing campaign, plus high-profile public events in key urban areas, and Together for Yes bus in selected constituencies.
- Major advertising and poster campaigns.
- National and regional media debate (classic and social media platforms) will be stepped up.
- Influencers and champions highly visible.

Phase 3. Closing argument and final Get Out the Vote. (7 days out)

To be reviewed. This is a 'once in a generation' opportunity – without change, women will continue to be harmed – your daughter, sister, wife – honesty, understanding, care, compassion.

