Online Advocacy:
Where are we now and where do we go from here?

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Online Advocacy: email and/or internet-based efforts to affect social and political change

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (LCVEF) researched best practices in online advocacy to inform its work with online advocacy systems designed to educate environmentalists and spur them to action on environmental policy issues. Anecdotal evidence aside, there was little research or collaborative analysis about what is working, what isn't and why. Clearly this medium is one in which there is increased investment on the part of the advocacy community. It is therefore worthwhile to investigate the best practices.

LCVEF interviewed 30 online advocacy network managers and asked them to answer a questionnaire about their individual network. LCVEF also interviewed 12 state-level decision makers who are targets for online advocacy. Some clear conclusions can be drawn and some questions remain:

- Online organizing is one tool in the larger organizing toolbox. It must have clearly articulated goals and investment appropriate to those goals;
- Building a relationship with online activists is crucial to the effectiveness of your program;
- It is worthwhile to educate activists on the importance of their response, identifying themselves as constituents and the value of personalizing their response;
- Activists need to understand their targets, and how their targets prefer to receive communications (email, faxes, phone calls or letters);
- Online advocacy managers need to be strategic – track what works and share information with like-minded organizers;
- The potential of online organizing is not well understood because there are many aspects that are not fully developed.

This research did not answer some important questions. More work must be done to define best practices in the field of online advocacy. Specifically, more research is needed on:

- Most effective recruitment techniques – both for activist retention and quality of activist;
- Online advocacy networks by their size and scope of work to offer more specific recommendations;
- What outcomes are possible or useful for online advocacy networks – policy change, education, reaching out to a different age group for an organization;
- Ways to overcome the unique challenges of a centralized effort that appears to produce form letters;
- Ways to share information so that the advocacy community can learn collectively from work in different sectors.

Finally, it is clear that online advocacy is here to stay. As decision makers become more comfortable with the technology of email it will remain a tool for inexpensive communication. Our community should continue to determine what works and what doesn't, share information, and improve our online advocacy efforts.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2001, The League of Conservation Voters Education Fund (LCVEF) conducted research on online advocacy programs. The research focused broadly on online advocacy efforts. In general the network manager of an online advocacy network alerts activists via email of an action to be taken. The network manager typically includes background information on the issue and a sample letter. The activist can then send an email message, which the network manager can choose to have delivered as an email or a fax, to a decision maker outlining the activist's position on the issue.

This research combined data from state, regional, and national online advocacy systems in the United States and Canada. A phone questionnaire elicited information from 30 online advocacy network managers (see appendix A). An Excel chart collected specific data on 24 networks (see appendix B) including 15 state-based networks, 1 regional network, and 8 national networks. Few managers filled out the Excel charts completely, so some data sets are smaller than the total 24 Excel charts collected. LCVEF staff and coalition partners also surveyed a small sample of state-level decision makers for their input on effective online advocacy efforts.

Even though a tremendous number of nonprofits of all sizes are using online advocacy of some sort, when this study began there wasn't any other research like this available. When you talk to people in the nonprofit community about online advocacy, you quickly discover that most organizations are trying some form of online advocacy and have high expectations, but that there is no serious collaborative analysis or discussion about what is working, what isn't and why. This study provides a baseline and a series of recommendations for current online advocacy efforts and for further research.

II. THE CURRENT STATE OF ONLINE ADVOCACY

In order to know where to go, it's important to know where we are. This research indicated that network managers feel that the networks are successful. Over 90% rated their networks from "above satisfactory" to "excellent", while less than 10% rated them "satisfactory".

Interestingly there are more differences than similarities. Some differences are a factor of the different organizations – large, small, national, local – that participated in the survey. A few of the networks have full time staff and significant budgets to recruit activists, while other networks are staffed a few hours a month by a single staff person who runs every aspect of the office. The amount of time and money an organization dedicates to online advocacy directly correlates to the number of activists recruited and the number of alerts and updates produced. However, the time and money dedicated did not seem to have a significant relationship to the response rate of the alerts or the managers' overall satisfaction with the outcome of their online advocacy efforts.

Network Overview

While the networks ranged in size, the typical state network in the study had 1000 to 5000 activists while national networks generally had over 10,000 activists and some had 50,000 to 150,000 (with working email addresses). The time per month spent managing these programs also varied widely. The average management time was in the 20-40 hour a month range, while some networks with limited staff could only provide 8 hours a month, and the largest and most complex networks had a staff member dedicated full time.

Response Rates

Response rates vary widely as well. State networks have response rates from just over 5% to nearly 30% (see Chart 1), while the larger national/regional networks had have 5% to 15% response rates. Interestingly, two much smaller national networks have response rates that averaged 40% to 55% (see Chart 2). Surprisingly, there was nothing close to a useful average - a common response rate that most networks hover around - while a few networks had significantly higher or lower response rates. This suggests that, at least in regard to increasing response rates, some networks are finding ways that work and some are not.

Response rate and size of network are not easily compared and response rate does not tell the whole story. Many large and some small networks segment their lists (break their lists into smaller segments and send emails to a subset of the total list). A network with 10,000 activists that averages a 5% response rate on their alerts may be sending alerts to small groups of 500 or 1000 activists, while a state network with 5000 activists that averages an 11% response rate may be sending all alerts to nearly 5000 activists. Therefore it's not accurate to assume that larger activist networks get lower response rates than the smaller ones (such as national/regional networks vs. state networks) simply because they are larger. One theory would be that larger networks generally get lower response rates than smaller networks because they are more impersonal

(*i.e*. have less of a relationship with their activists) and because their recruiting methods net them lower quality activists (*i.e*. activists who don't respond to alerts as frequently).

The overall quality of the activist base is addressed in Chart 3. This chart compares ten networks and shows how many activists on these networks have responded to 75 percent or more of the alerts, how many responded to three or more of the alerts, and how many responded to none of the alerts sent between January 2000 and April 2001. Once again the networks are quite different. The last two networks show that they have a large number of very responsive activists, while networks such as #5 have many activists willing to respond occasionally, but very few who will respond consistently. Perhaps the most important finding here is that many of the networks have a small minority of activists who respond to alerts while 20 to 70 percent (and in one case 85 percent) of activists have not responded to a single alert.

Quality of Response: Letter Edit Rate

While all networks strive for higher response rates, decision makers indicate that the quality of the responses are more significant for most advocacy work (see "Decision Maker Research" for further discussion of this topic). One way to measure the quality of the responses relates to how many activists modify the form letters that are typically sent as part of an alert. The percent of letters that activists edit in some way (letter edit rate) from the sample letter again varies widely, but most networks are in the 10% to 40% range. Even within networks the rates varied quite a bit (*e.g*. the percent of letters edited within a single network sometimes ranges from 15% to 50% over a years worth of alerts). It must be understood that the software calculates that a letter is "edited/modified" if even one character is changed, so there is no way to tell without looking at each individual letter if a single word was changed or if the entire sample letter was rewritten into the activists' own words. Some evidence suggests that most activists who modify the sample letter simply add one or two sentences at the beginning or end of the letter. It is worth noting that these may get lost in a pile of unmodified form letters sent to decision makers. The content of the sample letter can affect the letter edit rate – sample letters that are long and include every point are difficult to edit so activists may tend to send them off as is. In some networks certain alerts had an extremely different letter edit rate from all the rest of the alerts.

It is clear that one way to increase letter edit rates is for the network manager to send out a message suggesting that activists edit their letters. The letter edit rate can be easily influenced as evidenced when Washington states' network shifted their letter edit rate from an average in the 30's to over 50% after sending a single email message to their activists explaining the importance of personalizing the sample letter. This letter edit rate drops back down again without continued activist education on the importance of personalizing the sample letters. The two networks with the highest response rates had some of the lowest letter edit rates. In general, networks with high response rates tended to have lower letter edit rates and vice versa. This is a topic worth more attention.

Alert Frequency

In the 16-month period (January 2000 – April 2001) each surveyed network sent between 2 and 157 alerts (see Chart 4). There is no way to point to an average number of alerts sent as some networks only existed for a fraction of the 16 month study period, and therefore couldn't have sent more than a few alerts. Many of the larger networks sent messages out to subsets of their entire list – therefore even though they sent perhaps 100 alerts, each activist only received a small portion of the total number of alerts that were sent. In general, network managers try not to send more than one alert per week to avoid burnout, and send at least one alert or other message each month to keep their activists involved and aware that they are part of the network.

Some of the data – time of day alerts sent, day of week – were originally collected to see if they had an effect on response rates. Ultimately these data couldn't be analyzed as there were too many other variables that affected response rate. From interviews and past experience, it seems likely that certain times of day and days of week are better than others to achieve higher response rates depending on each network's group of activists. For example, if the network activists comprise busy professionals who check their email during the work day, it may be best to send alerts in the late morning when they have had a chance to review their inbox

and the alert doesn't get lost among a slew of other emails. If the network activists comprise weekend computer users, a weekend or Friday afternoon alert may produce greater response rates. Other factors are worth consideration as well. If their letter is being sent as a fax, will the recipient's fax machine be on during the weekend and will it have sufficient paper to receive all the letters being sent? Obviously, increasing your response rate by a few points is not valuable if most of the faxes your activists send are never received.

Invest in the Activist Relationship

There is no easy way to recruit activists or raise response rates (see appendix A for a list of suggestions). Recruiting activists and raising response rates is an ongoing process that takes money, staff time, and creativity. One problem is that very few organizations analyze and track the effectiveness of various methods. Therefore each group continues to recruit without knowing what other groups have learned. In general, comments from network managers suggest that increasing response rates are connected to building a relationship with activists. Building an effective network depends on sufficient staff time to build relationships with activists. The network manager must think about the needs of the activists as well as the needs of the campaign. A successful network manager thinks from the perspective of the network's activists and provides something for them as well as asking them to answer alerts.

The managers we surveyed suggested providing adequate background material in concise, well-written emails (several over time if necessary) and building trust by consistently offering accurate information that linked to reliable sources (well respected organizations, government sites, credible spokespeople, etc.). In order to do this a network manager must first find out who the activists are and what they want. Finally, providing timely updates about the outcomes of alerts was considered essential to building trust and loyalty among activists. Ultimately, the research indicates that the investment of time in relationship building made a difference in outcomes.

III. DECISION MAKER RESEARCH

"Constituents are more influential than a lobbyist." ~ a state legislator

Decision makers are the people - legislators, agency personnel, corporate executives - who receive the faxes, letters and phone calls from activists. How they receive and react to grassroots contacts is one of the most important and least understood parts of online advocacy. This is worthy of a significant research effort that was beyond our capacity in this online advocacy study. We interviewed 12 state-level decision makers from three different states (MN, GA, and WA) to offer some preliminary information. Many of these people were friendly or neutral on our progressive issues, so there is some potential bias that should be considered when reading the results.

The critical lesson from this research was that every decision maker handles advocacy correspondence differently. *It is therefore essential that organizations research the decision makers that they hope to influence to find out their preferred methods of correspondence and how they respond to different forms of communication.*

Each decision maker surveyed had a preferred way to receive correspondence. One legislator said phone calls get the most immediate attention, followed by personalized and original letters and faxes (which will be seen by the legislator) and that email was least preferred. Another legislator said letters are most effective and emails are a close second and that phone calls are good for "for or against" tallies but not much else. This legislator said faxes are not effective because the fax machine is shared among many offices and sometimes faxes are lost. Many mentioned personally written letters as the best form of contact (note: this research was conducted before September 11th, 2001). Yet others said phone or email was the best form of contact. Some legislators say they read all personal emails and reply to many of them themselves, while others say they don't deal with emails at all and have their secretary read those and provide a synopsis. In general, any form of correspondence was adequate as long is it was legible and came from a constituent.

Constituents Matter

One thing was universal: the correspondence had to be from people within their district or they would typically ignore it. Several legislators suggested that people should say that they are a constituent in the first line of the correspondence. Personalized correspondence, even something very short, is significantly more powerful than any kind of form letter or standardized text. As one legislator said, "Sometimes we get faxes that just add a name and that means nothing". Follow-up phone calls after a letter, fax, or email are considered by decision makers to be an effective way to reinforce the message. Agency decision makers stressed contacts during the specified comment period. Thus there was no consistent favorite form of correspondence among the decision makers who were surveyed. What was consistent was that the decision makers want personalized and timely contact from identifiable constituents.

Challenges of Systematic Grassroots Contact

Activists sending correspondence from a centralized system, such as an online action system, face a unique challenge. When decision makers are already persuaded about an issue, they want to receive as much correspondence as possible to bolster their decision and show that citizens are behind them. In many cases, correspondence goes to decision makers who are undecided or on the other side of the issue. "Unfriendly" decision makers may find it easy to disregard faxes or emails that come from a centralized system as unrepresentative and manufactured. When communicating with decision makers who aren't already on our side, it is important to pay special attention to educating activists on the importance of personalizing correspondence and using follow-up phone calls. One challenge is to ensure that decision makers understand that the correspondence they receive is from a constituent who cares about this issue even if it is facilitated by an advocacy group.

Correspondence from a centralized system faces a credibility challenge with decision makers. Some decision makers look at them, others bundle them and count them as one, and others don't consider them at all. One decision maker said, "Mass emails that look the same could even be counter productive," while another appreciated emails that had the same subject line because they could easily be sorted and tallied. A few decision makers said they had become desensitized to grassroots efforts involving communications from a centralized system, but many said they believe these systems could be effective as long as it was clear that messages were coming from individual citizens in the legislators' district. One even cited a specific example where he changed his mind on an issue because of such contacts.

IV. AN OVERALL PLAN FOR ONLINE ADVOCACY

"Nobody is yet moving beyond action requests to relationship-building." ~ an online technology conference participant

To incorporate the existing online advocacy research it's essential to create a plan and answer the question, "what is the purpose of communications with network activists?" Online advocacy is not a silver bullet; it is one tool in the toolbox. It requires an investment in resources and planning for its potential to be realized. Although there should be an overall plan that integrates with your offline organizing, it is important to create individual plans for affecting policy, recruiting online activists, and increasing participation in the online advocacy system. As you create a plan for your online advocacy work, several factors should be considered. If there is one overarching goal, it is to *build relationships*. This was considered the best way to build a truly effective online advocacy network. Of course this can't be one size fits all, but listed below are some broad concepts that have been suggested to develop a sustainable high quality online advocacy network.

Develop an Integrated Plan

- Clearly outline your goal(s) (*e.g*. affecting policy, educating activists, building membership, finding volunteers, *etc*.) – and develop a strategy to reach them
- Your strategy should seamlessly combine online and offline organizing - Develop a strategic plan that includes online advocacy as one component
- Utilize strategic recruiting – in the places where it matters. To increase activist quality, target the 3 of 4 and 4 of 4 voters (if you have an enhanced membership list) in phoning/direct mail recruiting efforts
- Part of your planning should be how to get communications to your targets in the right flow and in the right medium (letters, emails, faxes, phone calls, *etc*.)
- Always collect email addresses (on your web site, on all brochures and sign up forms, *etc*.)

Focus on Quality Communication

- Communicate consistently with your activists (generic rule of thumb is at least once a month, but not more than once a week)
- Develop a clear, concise, compelling message that really resonates with *your* activists
- Only send well-written alerts and make sure to send updates and "thank you's"
- Build trust by consistently offering accurate information that links to credible sources
- Write short alerts or start with a summary section
- Consider day of week and time of day when sending alerts
- The subject line is important – make it catchy without hyperbole

Know Your Decision Makers and Your Activists

- Research your targets and see what method(s) of contact will have the most impact
- Make sure fax machine numbers and email addresses are correct and that your communications are being received
- Have your activists clearly identify themselves as constituents when they write their legislators
- Educate your activists about why it is important to personalize letters, how to personalize them enough so that the people receiving them can tell, and how to follow up with a phone call when possible
- Know your activists and what they want - send out a questionnaire to gather this information

Keep Good Notes

- Budget enough time to track your results (of recruiting methods, changes that might get better response rates, *etc*.)
- Keep track of what works and what doesn't and share information

V. AREAS WHERE MORE RESEARCH IS NEEDED

This research provides a basic sketch of where online organizing is today. Yet this research did not answer many important questions, others were only partially answered, and new questions surfaced. Also, because of how rapidly the online environment is evolving, some techniques that work well today may not work well tomorrow. Clearly, there are areas where more research would be valuable:

1. Some of the goals of this research were to find the best methods to recruit activists and raise the response rates of existing activists. Because so few groups were collecting hard data on this, we could only provide a list of ideas without any real indication of how well various methods worked. While this compiled anecdotal evidence is helpful, it is not as useful as hard data on the costs of recruiting activists via different methods and well-organized tests of methods to raise response rates. Of course, before this research can be done, networks will need to accurately collect this data.

2. The scale of this research was large, and this offered a good overview but low detail. Further research may want to break down the data collection and analysis to specific types of networks (*e.g*. only state-based networks or only coalition networks) to offer more detailed answers applicable to specific types of networks.

3. Although many network managers considered affecting policy to be the primary goal of their advocacy network, some network managers described additional, often unrecognized, benefits to online advocacy. Some of these possible "secondary" benefits include bringing a new demographic to the paid membership, getting people progressively more involved and committed, and educating people who might not receive our message other ways. These could be extremely significant benefits and we should do further research to see if they are possible within online advocacy networks.

4. It would be helpful to create a shared methodology to track how well various recruiting and methods for raising response rates are working and easily share information. We should also analyze the networks that are doing best (highest response rates, *etc*.) and create a list of "best practices."

VI. CONCLUSION

The League of Conservation Voters Education Fund researched online advocacy to develop a sense of what is working, what isn't and why in this new and rapidly evolving medium. Online advocacy has seen increased interest and funding and it will remain an important tool. Yet it appears to have more potential than is currently realized. This research outlines ideas that an online advocacy manager might use to increase the effectiveness of their work. Some of the ideas require a greater time allocation and will be quite difficult to implement given nonprofit organizations' limited resources. Other ideas can easily be integrated into the organization's current online advocacy efforts.

To understand how effective this online advocacy tool can be, it is essential that we develop ways to share information and test our ideas. Many of these online advocacy networks run on software that has integrated tracking tools which allow the manager to easily view how many activists took action, how many modified the form letter, etc. With these tools we can test new ideas and develop a shared set of best practices. Some of these practices, such as building and maintaining a relationship with your activists, are easy in concept but very difficult in practice. We will need to dedicate the resources to develop clearly articulated goals and the staff time and expertise to reach those goals. Over time, the results will speak for themselves.

APPENDIX A - Survey responses from network managers

The responses below were complied from the interviews of 30 state, regional, and national online advocacy network managers from the United States and Canada. Some of this is anecdotal evidence that one or several of the managers suggested during the interview.

1) Have you found any ways to increase your response rate. Do you have any other ideas?

- **Keep your activists' trust by remaining credible (don't resort to hyperbole, check your facts, and cite/link some credible sources or use quotes from credible people)**
- **Know your activists**
  - **Do public opinion research -- find out who your activists are that are responding (e.g. 18-34 females) and focus your writing style and alert content on them**
  - **Survey your membership**
- **Communicate**
  - **Educate your activists with <u>regular</u> updates and remember the "thank you" messages**
  - **Let activists know when a particular issue campaign is beginning and when it ends**
  - **Tell them what happened after each campaign**
  - **Communicate regularly (at least once a month)**

  - **Distribute a monthly or quarterly update newsletter**
  - **Send out a questionnaire asking if any activists are interested in other activities (speaking, meeting with legislators, etc.)**
- **Write Quality Alerts**
  - **Make your alerts so enticing that people want to distribute them to friends and colleagues**
  - **Write short alerts and/or start with a summary section**
  - **The subject line is critical – it should be punchy without going over the top (avoid a string of exclamation points!!!!!) to the point and not generic**
  - **Keep the subject matter as interesting as possible (for your activists, not for you!) – don't let the lobbyist write the alert**
  - **Edit and reedit alerts and messages**
- **Send alerts mid-day during the workweek -- day of week and time sent is important because many people tend to respond right away or not at all (your activists may prefer different timing, you can survey them to find out -- most, but not all, groups think mid-week is best both for activists and to insure the fax gets received and do not end up going to fax machines that have been turned off or have run out of paper)**
- **Get the issue in the media before doing the alert -- activists, especially e-activists tend to respond to issues they perceive as "hot" -- get your issue into online media (e.g. Grist Magazine)**
- **Send alerts on hot issues -- send them as soon as possible after breaking news (e.g. After news of Bush Administration pulling out of Kyoto Protocol one group sent an alert that day and it got a 60% response rate)**
- **Try to highlight a clear "bad guy" if one exists**
- **Highlight activists on website or newsletter to encourage others and show how little time it takes to take meaningful action**
- **Set up activist trainings/workshops**
- **Make it as easy and quick as possible to take action**
- **Vary the targets to keep your activists' interest**
- **Don't send too many alerts (once every two weeks is a rule of thumb, but survey your activists to see what they think)**
- **Send from a personal account with a link and ask people to forward it**
- **Bring it close to home if you can segment your list -- "Oregon's water in danger" is good, but "Portland's water in danger" is better**
- **Try an html email with a visually appealing image**
- **Constantly work on educating your membership for long-term sustainable & high response rates**
- **Collaborate with others (e.g. medical professionals often want to be involved and are most credible with the public)**
- **Offer simple perks that connect to the internet (e.g. downloadable stickers that are designed to go on a mouse -- ClickForCleanAir.com or "the first 100 people to respond to this alert will get to send a tree to ___")**
- **Make it user-friendly -- one group is working on a feature that will allow activists to decide how many alerts they get, what day they get them, and on what issue**

Approximately how much time do you spend each month managing your email network? Are other people involved with managing your network? How much time do they spend on it each month?

This varies widely among the groups surveyed. The average was in the 20-40 hour a month range, while some networks with limited staff could only provide 8 hours a month and the largest and most complex networks had a staff member dedicated full time.

Approximately what is the yearly budget for your email network (not including staff time)?

This varies widely among the groups surveyed – from basic maintenance costs and staff time to those costs and a $70,000/year recruiting budget.

What do you see as the main benefit(s) of running an email-based network?

- **Low overhead**
- **Easy to pass messages and alerts along to others**
- **You can reach people very quickly without regard for geographical distance**
- **Allows for more interaction between activists and action network manager**
- **Activists can easily take action**
- **General coalition building, also making sure coalitions sign off on the same message is a trust builder**
- **Can be used as way to build the level of work activists are willing to do**
- **Reaches beyond the usual environmental supporters to reach a more diverse group**
- **You can convert activists to paying members**
- **Ability to target communications**
- **Ability to focus work on certain targets**
- **Ability to track response rates**
- **Getting general environmental supporters interested in state issues (state-based networks)**

How is organizing an email-based network different from other types of field organizing?

- **You can get more people involved - but they are generally willing to do very little**
- **Technical skills needed are very different from field organizing**
- **It's more personal than direct mail**
- **Complimentary to field organizing and more of a communication tool**
- **Online the campaign must already be striking a chord with people to get high response rates**
- **Email campaigns have explosive potential**
- **Less personal than field organizing and often less gratifying for both organizer and activist**
- **You reach a different demographic online**

What are the main problems with your email network?

- **Assessing how effective it is**
- **Inadequate staff time to communicate with members and manage data**
- **Making organizations and activists aware that this tool exists**
- **Continuity – most groups use it as a reactive tool rather than building a strategy**
- **Recruiting - sustaining the flow of new activists**
- **Getting messages written and approved in a timely manner**
- **Over time, a lack of interest on behalf of coalition partners**
- **Accuracy of the fax/emails of targets**
- **Management time to answer emails from activists**
- **Technical glitches that cause faxes to fail**
- **Trying to assess how effective this is at affecting policy**
- **Dealing with the numbing effect due to everyone using systems like this and generating tons of emails and faxes.**
- **Specific to GetActive software - inability to sort data and slowness of website**

What are the methods you use to recruit new activists?

- **paid phone recruitment (this typically runs $6 to $12 per name)**
- **volunteer phone recruitment**
- **tabling w/ recruitment postcards**
- **hire paid or volunteer (riding coordinators/ online action team) to spread the word online (listserves, chat rooms, etc.) and do research**
- **intern to do recruiting – tabling at local events, talks at colleges, postcards in stores, etc.**
- **ask board members to do recruiting**
- **online banner ads**
- **radio spots**
- **website**
- **links from websites**
- **newsletter article**
- **e-newsletter article**
- **get stories in local press or regional/national environmental magazines**
- **"tell a friend" feature on GetActive software**
- **membership drive by snail mail (completed annually) – make sure to factor in time for data entry of postcards**
- **direct mail to hot lists w/ follow-up phone bank (30% "yes" rate reported by one group)**
- **broadly distributing action alerts to group emails, list servs, etc.**
- **pass around sign up sheet at conferences, meetings, etc.**
- **personal emails from a well-respected person to their email list with a link to your sign up page (e.g. head of the Nursing Association)**
- **personal emails with a link to your sign up page to a list serv or email list from an important or well-known person who might have name recognition with your potential activists (e.g. Robert Redford)**
- **put "forward to a friend" link in every update that discusses a successful alert**
- **automatically sign up your new members of coalition organizations and then tell them they can remove themselves when the first alert arrives if they want to (this may not be acceptable??)**
- **billboards, bus advertising**
- **send recruitment materials to conferences**
- **organize large public events and recruit there**
- **house parties**
- **word of mouth**
- **flash animations**
- **focus on your base & keep working (newsletter ads, emails requests, direct mail) to pull them in**

Do you use your email network for other purposes?

- **Announcing rallies, lobby day, etc.**
- **Let people know about Earth Day Activist kit**
- **Generate letters to the editor**
- **Recruit volunteers**
- **Find people willing to speak to/teach groups in their community**
- **Get out the vote efforts**

How would you rate the success of your email-based network overall?

Poor	**0%**
Satisfactory	**9.25%**
Satisfactory/Good	**9.25%**
Good	**37.5%**
Good/Excellent	**18.75%**
Excellent	**25%**

Other comments/suggestions for improving email-based networks?

- **We need more opportunities to communicate with others who are doing online advocacy**
- **Additional staff support and sufficient money to build and maintain the system**
- **A code of conduct to avoid abuse & overuse of these systems**
- **Research on how effective this has been and how it has affected those people on the receiving end of the emails/faxes**
- **More communication avenues (e.g. phone patch thru)**
- **Back up in case something fails (e.g. if faxes fail to go through)**
- **Auto rollover to email if fax fails and vice versa**
- **Spell checking feature on web-based systems**
- **Option to eliminate the "send directly from your email" option for activists (this often causes activists to send letters with strings of computer characters and it might be best if they had to send from the web site)**
- **Finding ways to use the system regularly to keep activists more involved**
- **Encourage national organizations to put their names in state-based networks**
- **ActionNetwork.org manual and online help for GetActive software**

APPENDIX B – Data collected from network managers (Example Chart)

An Excel chart that lists specific questions was emailed to network managers of 30 online advocacy networks. All network managers received a phone call from LCVEF staff members Bill Bradlee or Terrilyn Bayne prior to the email so that we could explain this project and get their commitment to turn in this Excel chart and answer our phone questionnaire. These data were compiled and analyzed to look for trends that offer insights into the current state of online advocacy.

ALERT SPECIFICS	Alert 1	Alert 2	Alert 3
"Exact Email Subject Line"			
Total number of activists to receive alert			
Response rate (%)			
How many activists used the "Tell a Friend" feature?			
Percent of letters that were edited/modified			

How many activists joined the network through this campaign?			
Time of day sent			
Date sent			
How many days/hrs did it take to generate ~75% of the responses?			
Percent of activists responded via web versus via email (ex: 25%: 75%)			
GENERAL INFORMATION FOR ALL ALERTS			
Activist Geography (statewide, regional, national, international)			
Main focus of network issues (statewide, regional, national, international)			
Focal Issue (s) (Energy, Water, etc.)			
Total Number of Activists (with working emails only)			
Total Number of Alerts sent January 2000 to April 2001			
Total Number of messages sent January 2000 to April 2001 (alerts, updates, etc.)			
ACTIVISTS			
How many activists have responded to 3 or more alerts between 1/00 and 4/01 (and have been on the network for the same length of time)			

How many activists have **never** responded between 1/00 and 4/01 (and have been on the network for the entire time)			
How many activists have responded to 75% or more alerts between 1/00 and 4/01 (and have been on the network for the entire time)			

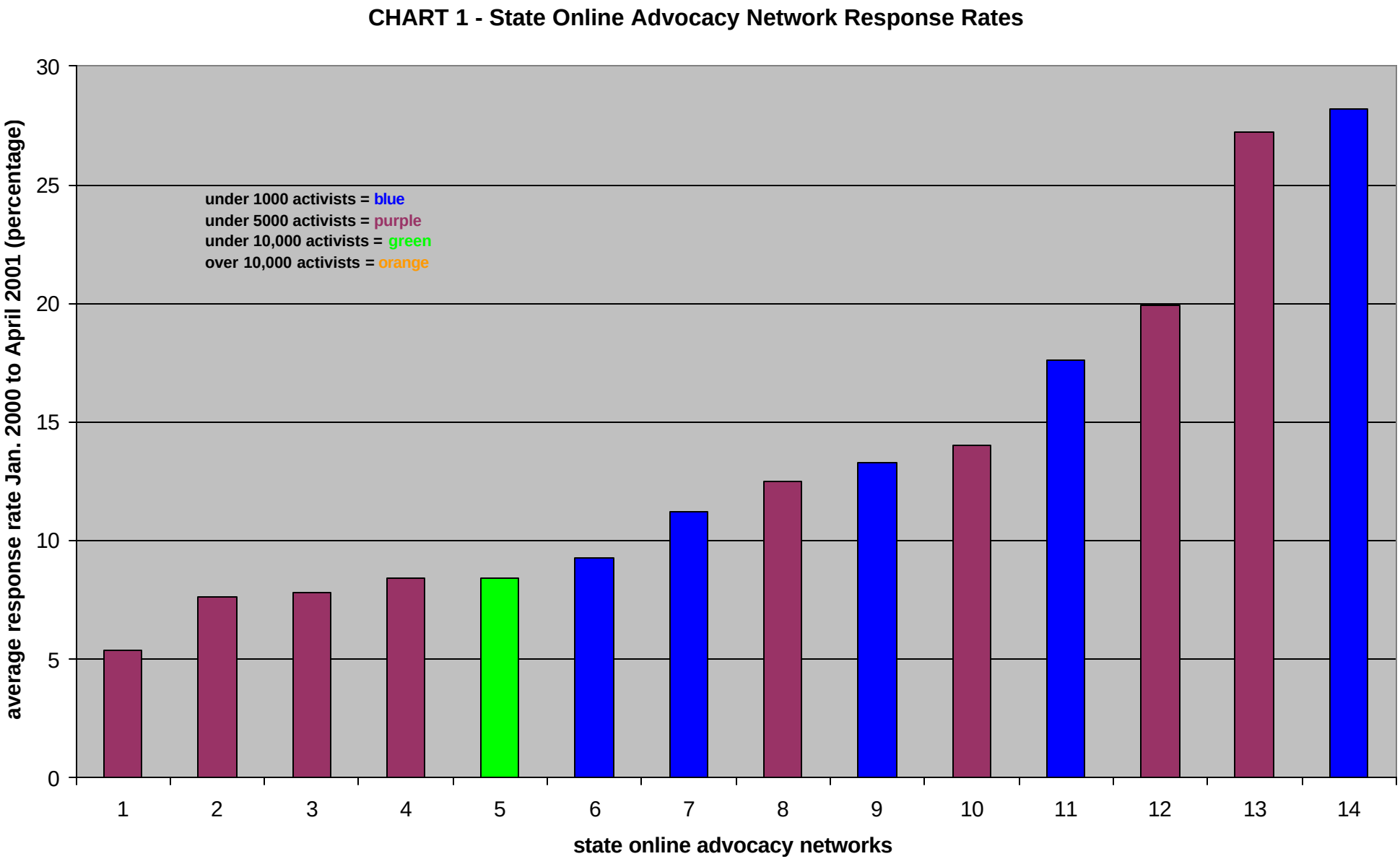
CHART 1 - State Online Advocacy Network Response Rates
average response rate Jan. 2000 to April 2001 (percentage)
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
under 1000 activists = blue
under 5000 activists = purple
under 10,000 activists = green
over 10,000 activists = orange
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
state online advocacy networks

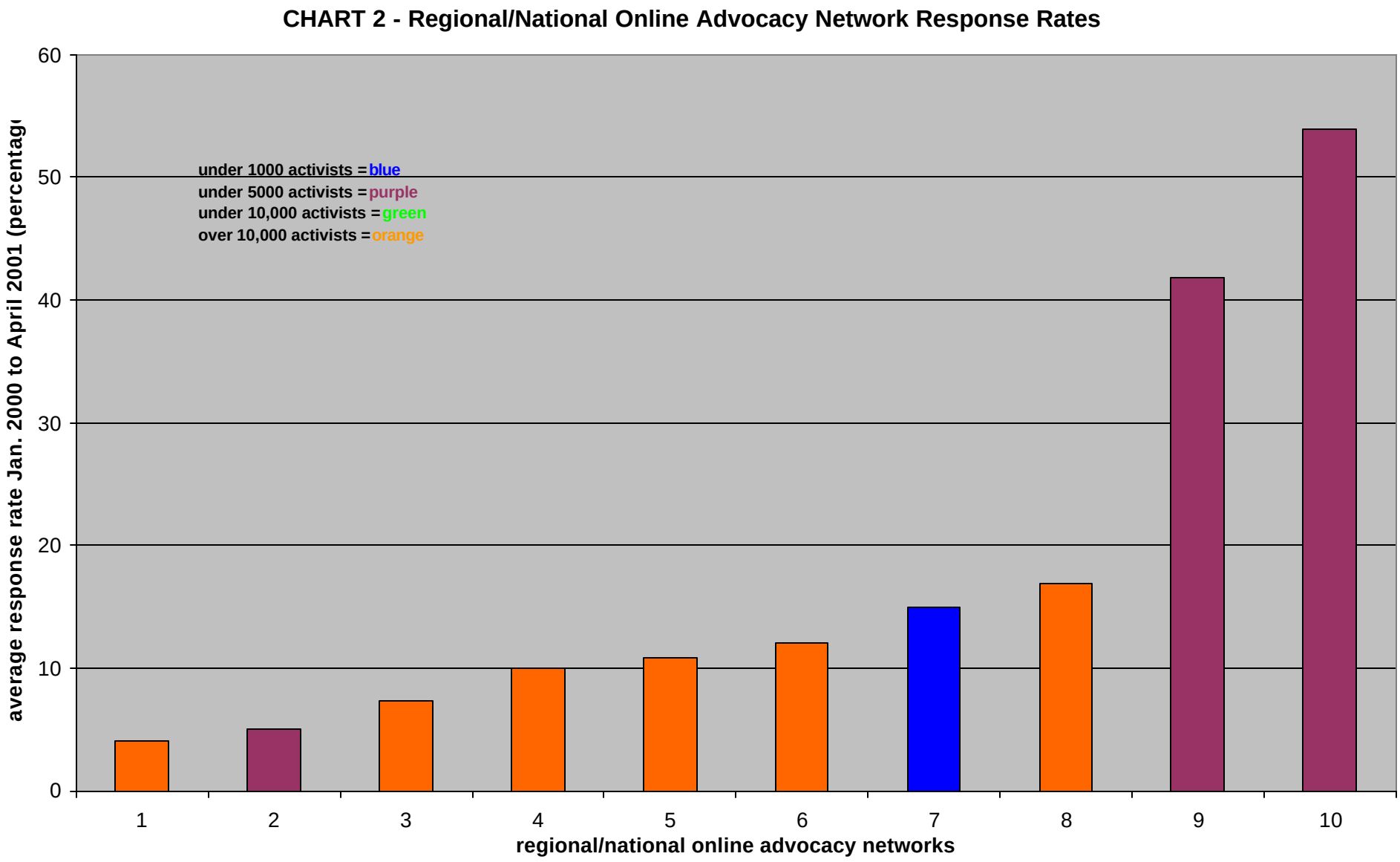
CHART 2 - Regional/National Online Advocacy Network Response Rates
average response rate Jan. 2000 to April 2001 (percentag
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
under 1000 activists = blue
under 5000 activists = purple
under 10,000 activists = green
over 10,000 activists = orange
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
regional/national online advocacy networks

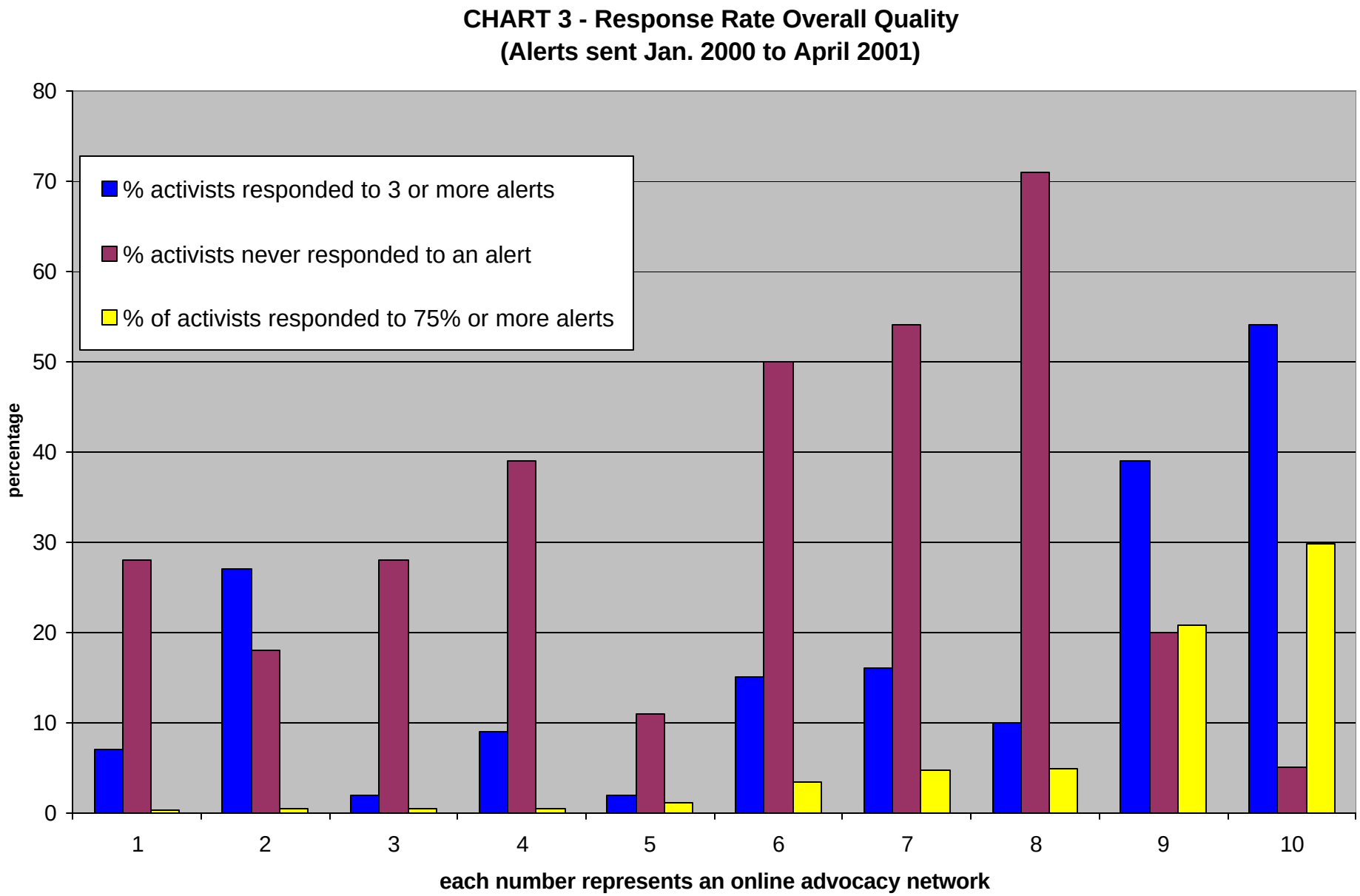
CHART 3 - Response Rate Overall Quality
(Alerts sent Jan. 2000 to April 2001)
% activists responded to 3 or more alerts
% activists never responded to an alert
% of activists responded to 75% or more alerts
percentage
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
each number represents an online advocacy network