

The impact of a pledge campaign and the promise of publicity: a randomized controlled trial of charitable donations*

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Abstract

Objective This study investigates whether asking people to make a pledge causes them to donate to a charitable cause and whether the promise of public recognition increases the effectiveness of the request.

Methods A randomized controlled trial in Manchester, UK where households were sent letters asking them to donate a book for school libraries in South Africa.

Results People who are asked to make a pledge and offered local public recognition are more likely to make a book donation than the control group. The combination of requesting a pledge and offering publicity raises book donations from 7.3 percent to 8.9 percent of households, an effect size of 22 percent. Asking people to pledge alone, without the promise of publicity has no statistically significant impact on giving

Conclusion Combining a pledge request and the promise of local publicity increases individual charitable donations.

When an individual makes a promise or commitment to behave in a certain way, they feel pressure to act consistently with that promise (Festinger, 1957; Bator and Cialdini, 2000). It seems clear that individuals who have made a pledge are more likely to act later than those who have not. As a result, pledge schemes have been set up by government and non-governmental organizations to invite individuals to make a public commitment to change their behavior. However, individuals who choose to make pledges are probably already the kinds of people who give to charity or recycle or vote, so it is hard to know whether it is the pledge that causes them to act, or simply their disposition. Overall, existing research is inconclusive on whether a pledge campaign is a successful way of encouraging charitable giving. Our study sets out to test just that, using an experimental design to find out whether asking households to pledge makes it more likely that they will later donate a book to charity. The randomized controlled trial allows a valid comparison to be made between households who are asked for a pledge and households who are not, keeping all other aspects of the message constant. Further, we test whether “image motivation” (Ariely *et al*, 2009) means that the promise of public recognition can augment a pledge campaign, providing even greater encouragement to donate to charity. We find that the most effective intervention is to ask people to pledge and also promise them local public recognition. The combination of requesting a pledge and offering publicity raised book donations by 1.6 percentage points, from 7.3 percent to 8.9 percent of households, an effect size of 22 percent. Inviting people to pledge does not have a statistically significant effect on charitable donations: it is the combination of the pledge request and the promise of publicity that have the impact.

Pledges

The theory behind pledges is that promising to do something makes it more likely that the person will later act on their good intention. Consistency is an important character trait and people who behave inconsistently are widely regarded as unreliable and untrustworthy

(Allgeier et al, 1979). There is a strong internal pressure on individuals to behave in a way that is consistent with how they see themselves (Festinger, 1957; Aronson, 1969). Individuals who commit to undertake a particular action can come to see themselves in a way that is consistent with it, leading to long-term changes in their attitudes and behavior (Dawney and Shah, 2005; McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, 1999). Pledging emphasizes the importance of specific behavioral intentions rather than generalized attitudes in predicting whether a behavior will take place. In a model of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010; for a summary of critiques see Manstead, 2011) or planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), the best predictor of behavior is intention, and strengthening intention makes the behavior more likely. A person's perception of relevant social norms, as well as their awareness of the degree of control they have in executing their intentions, has an effect on whether and how they act. The pledge can act as a catalyst, providing the internal conviction for a new identity and leading to behavior that corresponds with that conviction, which can last well beyond the duration of the pledge. A pledge to volunteer, vote, recycle or give to charity increases the likelihood that an individual will later act in a way that is consistent with the promise made. "When individuals feel committed to a certain type of behavior, they will often adopt an identity that is consistent with that behavior, the result of which frequently is long-lasting behavior change" (Bator and Cialdini, 2000:536).

Pledging appeals to the notion that people sometimes fall short of fulfilling their altruistic objectives. Despite their good intentions to help wider society they can forget to do something or feel too busy. To overcome this problem, charities and public agencies adopt pledge schemes to encourage people to give money or to carry out a civic act. Research studies examine whether making a pledge or commitment to an unfamiliar person leads to behavior change such as recycling, voting, use of car safety belts, smoking and pro-environmental activities. The results are inconclusive. A doorstep visit asking people to

pledge can raise recycling rates, and the effect is similar to other approaches such as incentives (Katzev and Pardini, 1987) or persuasive leaflets (Burn and Oskamp, 1986); but the design of the research makes it hard to separate out whether it is the personal visit or the request for a commitment that leads to the behavior change. Other studies find that securing pledges through direct personal contact works better than through indirect contact or educational information alone; but these studies did not have a control group to enable them to compare pledge and non-pledge methods (Reams and Ray 1993; Bryce, Day and Olney, 1997). A more recent waste recycling study compared doorstep canvassing with and without a pledge and found that asking for a pledge makes it no more likely that people recycle (Thomas, 2006). Pledges are often included as part of a wider promotional campaign, making it difficult to assess the particular contribution made by the pledge. A pledge campaign to encourage cyclists to wear helmets was successful in increasing their use, but participants were provided with information and a voucher while being asked to commit making it difficult to separate out the different effects (Ludwig *et al*, 2005). Similarly, use of car safety belts rose among those who signed a pledge, but the study participants were also provided with a card to hang in their car as a reminder and entered into a prize draw, so, again, it is hard to separate out the pledge effect from other cues (Geller *et al.*, 1989).

Students who were contacted by telephone and asked to state whether they would vote in an upcoming US general election had a higher turnout rate than people in a control group who were not asked to make a prediction (Greenwald *et al.*, 1987). This suggests that being asked for a pledge can have a positive effect on voter turnout, but the sample size was small. In a larger scale replication conducted among a broader cross-section of US residents in 2000, there was no significant shift in voter turnout among those who were asked to predict whether they would vote compared to a control group (Smith, Gerber and Orlich, 2003). Get Out the Vote experiments typically include a remark such as “Can I count on you to vote?” (Gerber

and Green, 2005:150), which is similar to a pledge. Michelson, Bedolla and McConnell explicitly use pledge or commitment theories to underpin their field experiment on the use of repeat phone calls to increase voter turnout, arguing that it is the act of making a commitment, whether written or verbal, which motivates people to follow through on their promise (Michelson, Bedolla and McConnell, 2009). Our approach differs from these voter mobilization campaigns in that we ask participants to make a more active response to the pledge invitation, requiring some additional effort on their part, completing and posting a pledge card, making a phone call or sending an email.

Publicity

Evidence shows that a pledge made in public is likely to be more effective than one made in private; once an intention has been publicly declared, it is harder to go back on the promise without appearing to be inconsistent (Cialdini, 2009:71). Individual actions are influenced by how citizens want to be seen in the eyes of others (Stern, 2000; Van Vugt et al., 2001) and people respond well to a simple ‘thank you’ (Rogers, 2004) so we might anticipate a positive reaction to a promise of publicity. The theory of reasoned action or planned behavior implies that the promise of publicity may increase the weighting of subjective norms in favor of the behavior, thereby strengthening behavioral intention and the likelihood of the action occurring. ‘Image motivation’ describes how citizens can be motivated by how others perceive their behavior: when individuals seek social approval they may choose to exhibit qualities that they think are widely regarded as good: ‘People will act more prosocially in the public sphere than in private settings’ write Ariely, Bracha and Meier (2009: 544). Donors appreciate the prestige they get from having their donations made public, and when donations are advertised in categories (e.g. gold, silver or bronze donors), people often give the minimum amount necessary to appear in a higher category (Harburgh, 1998). In a laboratory experiment people were more likely to contribute to charity if their donations were made

public. These results were sustained in a field experiment, in which people were more likely to cycle on an exercise bike for charity if the bike was placed in a prominent public position (Ariely, Bracha and Meier, 2009). Get Out the Vote experiments have shown that “social pressure” mailings, letting people know whether or not they or their neighbors voted last time, can increase voter turnout (Gerber, Green and Larimer, 2008). This partly relies on shaming as people realize that their behavior is being observed and may be notified to others. One field experiment compared shaming with ‘pride’ approaches, publicizing the names of voters or non-voters, and found that while shaming is more effective overall in mobilizing people to vote, ‘pride’ approaches were only effective amongst high-propensity voters (Panagopoulos, 2010). Thanking people for civic behavior, such as voting, has also been shown to have positive effects by reinforcing prosocial behaviour (Panagopoulos, 2011).

Research design

Charities and public organizations seek out the best ways to persuade citizens to donate time, money or goods. Mailing letters to ask for donations is one method that is effective (Karlan and List, 2007; Huck and Rasul, 2008; Karlan, List and Shafir, 2011) and relatively cheap. In this randomized controlled trial we mailed a charitable request to 11,812 households to test whether inviting households to pledge and offering them publicity are more effective than simply asking for a donation.¹ Firstly, we expected that inviting households to pledge would make it more likely that they would later donate a book because they would feel they had made a commitment and want to see it through. Secondly, we expected the promise of public recognition to enhance the pledge campaign, making it more likely that people would donate. We expected that households who were advised their donation would be made public would donate more books than the pledge request only group because they would know that their generosity will be advertised to their peers. We adhered to recommended

¹ We follow the CONSORT guidelines for reporting randomized controlled trials (Schulz *et al* 2010).

practice (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith, 1999; Cialdini, 2009) by designing the pledge request to be made in public, to require some effort and to be voluntary. We asked people to make a public commitment, which entailed giving their name and address to a university researcher, an unfamiliar person. The pledge required the completion and return of a postcard, or sending an email or making a phone call, all of which require some effort. The pledge scheme involved no coercion or undue pressure as it was just a simple postal request.

Data and Randomization

In the spring of 2010, in collaboration with a local charity, we organized a charitable campaign in Manchester, UK to collect books for school libraries in South Africa. The research was undertaken in two contrasting electoral wards: Ward A is relatively affluent, close to the University and largely made up of private housing; Ward B is relatively poor, further from the University, and has a high proportion of social rented housing. The sampling unit was households. We obtained a list of all the postcodes (zipcodes) in the two electoral wards from the local government. We manually identified all the postal addresses in those postcodes, using an address finder, omitting any that were commercial or business properties. The address file included all residential properties in the two areas, both houses and flats, resulting in a total of 11,812 households, 5,851 in Ward A and 5,961 in Ward B.

We asked two direct marketing companies for an estimate of the response we might get if we asked people on their lists to give a book for charity: one estimated between 1 and 5 percent and another between 0.5 and 3 percent. Prior to the fieldwork, we undertook power calculations and estimated that in one of the wards, with approximately 1,900 in each of the three groups, we would have 99 percent of statistical power to detect a difference of 2.0 percentage points between a control group donation rate of 1.5 percent and a treatment group donation rate of 3.5 percent. We undertook the research in two wards, so the number of

households is twice the size, providing us with sufficient power to detect the anticipated differences.

We randomly assigned households in each electoral ward to one of three groups of equal size: the Pledge request only group were invited to make an advance commitment to donate; the Pledge request plus publicity group were invited to make an advance commitment and also informed that a list of donors would be published; the control group were sent a similar request, but without the pledge or publicity messages. The randomization was done independently of the research team, using the SPSS random selection function.² We compared neighborhood level baseline characteristics across the three groups to ensure the randomization process had generated equivalent groups and we found that it had. We checked that households in the three groups were evenly distributed across the neighborhoods.

The research was undertaken in partnership with Community HEART, a UK registered charity formed by anti-apartheid activist Denis Goldberg, which supports local self-help initiatives in South Africa (registered charity number 1052817). Community HEART collects children's books in the UK and transports them to South Africa, where they are used to set up school libraries.³

Intervention – a Campaign for Book Donations

We sent two letters, several weeks apart, to each of the 11,812 households, advising them of an upcoming Children's Book Week and asking them to donate a second hand book for school libraries in South Africa. The letters had a very simple design, were on University of Manchester letterhead paper, and were addressed to *The Residents*. We employed a research company to send out the letters in the public post. The first letters delivered the same common message, regardless of which group the household had been assigned to, as shown in Figure 1.

² Randomization undertaken by Professor David Torgerson at York Trials Unit, University of York.

³ <http://www.community-heart.org.uk/projects/books/books.htm>.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

After this common message, the wording of the first letter differed, depending on which group the household had been allocated to. The first letter to households in the pledge request only group asked, *‘Please pledge to donate a second hand book (by postcard, email or phone)’* and a pledge card was included with the letter, addressed but without a stamp. The first letter to the pledge & publicity group outlined the same message, and included an identical pledge card, with an added message, *‘A list of everyone who donates a book will be displayed locally’*. The first letter to the control group outlined the basic message, without the pledge or the offer of publicity. Over the following weeks, a log was kept of all the residents who had made a pledge to donate a book, by postcard, email or phone call.

A second letter was sent four weeks later to all households in the study, reminding them of the book collection and informing them for the first time of the drop-off points to take the books to. Along with the second letter, we sent each household a plastic envelope to use for their donated books; each bag had a unique identifier number to allow us track who had given. We added a blank name and address label to the bag so all donors could choose to write their details on the bag or to donate anonymously. The second letter contained the same common message regardless of which group the household had been assigned to, as is shown in Figure 2.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

After this common message, the wording of the second letter was different, depending on which group the household had been allocated to and whether they had pledged. The second letter to households in the Pledge request only group, who had made a pledge added, *‘Thank you for pledging to donate a second hand book’* and we returned their completed pledge card or a copy of their email, as a reminder. The second letter to households in the Pledge & Publicity group who had made a pledge included the same text, with an added

message, *'A list of everyone who donates a book will be displayed locally'*. The second letter to the control group outlined the basic message, without any mention of the pledge or the offer of publicity. The second letter to households from the Pledge request only group who had not pledged was the same as that sent to the control group. The second letter to households from the Pledge request plus publicity group who had not pledged was the same as the control group, with an added message *'A list of everyone who donates a book will be displayed locally'*. The second letter was not randomly assigned; it was conditional on the response the household made to the first letter, and was tailored to that response. The overall treatment effect is a combination of the first plus the second letter.⁴

Outcome measurement

We invited residents to take donated books to one of six book collection points, three in each area, during Children's Book Week, 27th Feb – 6th March 2010. We chose a variety of different drop-off points, in various locations, including two libraries, a primary school, a children's centre, a cafe and a community centre. We collected the book bags twice a day from the drop-off points and took them to a storage depot. For each donation we used the unique identifier on the book bag to identify the donor's address and additionally we recorded the number of books donated, the chosen drop-off point, and the donor's name, if given. If books were left without a book bag or any other identifier, we recorded it as an anonymous donation. Households were not informed that they were taking part in a research study or that other households were sent differently worded letters. The monitoring of the book donations, recording which households had donated books, was done by a researcher who had no other involvement in the study and who was blinded to group assignment.

⁴ McKenzie-Mohr and Smith suggest that commitment approaches work best if they are combined with other forms of marketing (1999:58). We did not have the capacity to mount a substantial campaign, but we did ensure that the letters we sent were attractive, we worked with an established registered charity, and we displayed posters in the local areas in the run up to the book collection.

Afterwards, we wrote to all donors from the pledge and control groups advising them a poster would be displayed in the local drop-off points and asking them to contact us if they did not want their name included. We produced one poster for each electoral ward, advertising the total number of books collected, listing the names of book donors (excluding anonymous donors) and thanking those who donated. We included a photograph of children in South Africa using books donated in the UK. The posters were displayed in all the local collection points. A flow diagram of the experiment is shown in Figure 3.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

Analysis and Results

To estimate the effects of group assignment on whether a household donated a book (or made a pledge) we undertook a comparison of proportions: for each treatment group, we calculated the difference between the proportion of households that donated from that group, and the proportion that donated in the control group, estimated the standard errors of those differences, and used them to produce 95 percent confidence intervals.⁵ We divided the difference in proportions by the standard error of the difference to produce a test statistic, z , and used a Normal Distribution Table to establish whether the difference was statistically significant (Altman, 1999: 232-5). We estimated the effect of group allocation on donations, taking account of known demographic factors, using complementary log-log regression, which is an appropriate estimator when the responses are rare and the outcome measure is categorical (Everitt and Palmer 2005, 67-68; StataCorp 2009, 295-303). However, we found similar results using probit models.⁶

Contact rate

⁵ We used Stata version 11 (StataCorp. 2009)

⁶ The table of these alternative regressions is available on request from the authors.

The household address list we used for the experiment contained the full postal address, but not the names of the occupiers. We printed an identical request on the back of each envelope, “if undelivered please return to:” followed by the research office address. We posted 11,812 letters and found that only 0.75 percent of them were returned to the research office, indicating a contact rate of 99.25 percent. We expected that some letters were posted to empty households and others were not opened, or were discarded as junk mail without being read. The contact rate was similar in the control and treatment groups: any small differences were not statistically significant. The analysis was by intention to treat: we included in the analysis all households that were assigned to a group, regardless of whether they received the allocated intervention or not.

Pledge rates

In Letter 1 we invited households in the two treatment groups to make a pledge to donate a book by returning a pledge card, sending an email or telephoning the research office. The response rate by experimental condition is shown in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Overall, 5.8 percent of the Pledge request plus publicity group made a pledge, compared to 5.0 percent of the Pledge request only group. Among the control group, 0.1 percent contacted us to pledge a book donation, despite this group not having been invited to pledge. The difference in the pledge rate between households who were asked to pledge (from both intervention groups) and those in the control group is 5.3 percentage points, and the difference is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$, z test, two-tailed). As expected, asking households to pledge makes it more likely that they will pledge. The difference between the two treatment groups is 0.8 percentage points and is not statistically significant. Although the Pledge request plus publicity group responded at higher rates than the Pledge request only

group, the apparent treatment effect is not statistically significant from zero. Among those who made a pledge, the most popular method was to return a pledge card: 64.2 percent of those who made a pledge used the pledge card supplied by us, compared to 21.6 percent who pledged by email and 14.3 percent who made a telephone pledge.

Intention-to-Treat Effects

Four weeks after the first contact, we sent Letter 2, in which we asked all households in the treatment and control groups to donate to South African schools by taking used books to local drop-off points. We present a summary of the response in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Overall, 8.2 percent of households in the Pledge request only group donated books, compared to 7.3 percent of the control group. The difference between the proportion of households who donated books in the pledge request only group and the control group is 0.9 percentage points, with a 95 percent confidence interval from -0.3 to 2.1. The difference is not statistically significant: while we cannot rule out a small effect, asking for a pledge did not have any substantial effect in persuading people to donate. However, 8.9 percent of households in the Pledge request plus publicity group donated books compared to 7.3 percent of the control group, a difference of 1.6 percentage points, with a 95 percent confidence interval from 0.4 to 2.8. The difference in donations between the Pledge request plus publicity group and the control group is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$, z test, two-tailed). Asking for a pledge and at the same time advising people that their donation will be publicized in the locality made it more likely that a household would give books, an effect size of 22 percent. The difference in donations between the pledge request only group and the pledge request plus publicity group is 0.7 percentage points and the difference is not statistically significant (95 percent confidence interval is -0.5 to 1.9). We found a high level of correlation between

making a pledge and donating a book: among those who made a commitment, 67.2 percent of households in the Pledge request only group and 71.5 percent of the Pledge request plus publicity group adhered to their pledge and went on to donate a book. This compared to 5.8 percent of households among those that did not make a commitment who went on to donate a book.

We were interested to find out whether assignment to the Pledge or the Pledge request plus publicity group made a difference to the likelihood that a household would donate a book, controlling for various neighborhood-level demographic variables which might be expected to influence the decision to give to a charitable cause. The effects of these factors on whether a household made a book donation were tested with complementary log-log regression models, which are reported in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

In Model 1, the donation of a book is predicted for all 11,812 households, and we estimate the impact of the random assignment to one or other of the treatment groups. Although the Pledge request only group responded at higher rates than the Control Group, the treatment effect is not statistically significant from zero: being asked for a pledge, on its own, was not sufficient to make it more likely that a household would donate books for charity. Assignment to the Pledge request plus publicity group is a statistically significant predictor of donating a book: those who were asked to pledge and were promised local publicity were more likely to make a donation than those in the control group who were simply asked to donate.

In Model 2, the donation of a book is predicted for all households and as well as estimating the impact of Group, we control for various demographic variables at the neighborhood level. The effect of assignment to the Pledge request only group or the Pledge

request plus publicity group is sustained after taking account of the various demographic variables between neighborhoods (extent of poverty, the proportion of older people, young people, single person households and people who declared a religion).⁷

Discussion and Conclusion

It is a widely-held view in behavioral economics (Dawney and Shah, 2005) social psychology (Bator and Cialdini, 2000) and social marketing (McKenzie-Mohr and Smith 1999) that asking for a commitment increases the likelihood that individuals will contribute to the wider good. This is based on the premise that once someone makes a commitment they start to feel like the sort of person that behaves in that way. They do not want to appear inconsistent to themselves or others. To test this claim, we implemented a commitment campaign, which followed good practice: the pledges were made in public, required some effort, were written down and entered into voluntarily. We found that asking for a pledge alone did not lead to a statistically significant rise in book donations over and above a general request letter, yet the combination of asking for a pledge and promising publicity does have an impact on behavior. People can be persuaded to help others by the promise that their actions will be made public. Citizens do not act in isolation; their actions are influenced by what others do, what people think is expected, and how they want to be viewed by others (Stern, 2000; Van Vugt et al., 2000). The promise of ‘information disclosure’ or prestige can promote civic behavior by signaling that the actions of an individual will be made known more widely (Ariely, Bracha and Meier, 2009; Harburgh, 1998). People want to be thanked when they participate (Rogers, 2004). In the book collection experiment, the most effective request was to ask people to make a pledge and tell them their name would be posted locally as a thank you for their donation. The additional influence of publicity resulted in a difference in pledges of 0.8 percent and a difference in donations of 0.7 percent between the pledge

⁷ We implemented a tobit model with the number of books as the outcome measure and found similar results. This table is available on request from the authors.

request only treatment group and the pledge request plus publicity group, although the differences are not statistically significant. Even though we cannot identify the precise mechanism that underlies the effect, one possible explanation for this is that making a pledge does help in getting people to donate, but we need to find persuasive methods to get them to pledge, and the offer of publicity helps achieve this.

The focus of our experiment is on whether pledge schemes are an effective tool to encourage civic behavior, rather than whether people who pledge are more likely to give. The research shows that there is a high correlation between making a pledge and taking action; more than two thirds of those who pledged went on to make a book donation. As expected, the sort of people who go to the effort of making a pledge are more disposed than others to go to a local drop-off point to donate a book. However, this simple observation that those who pledge often go on to give cannot elucidate the relationship between pledge and giving, because if we only look at the behavior of those who pledge, without a control group, it is hard to know whether it is the pledge that makes them do it, or whether it is just their disposition. Our research design raises the possibility of spillover effects (Sinclair and Green, 2012), with members of one treatment group accidentally getting access to another treatment by talking to their neighbors or observing the behavior of others. The effect of any spillover would be to dampen rather than exaggerate the impact of the interventions. The possibility of a small spillover effect cannot easily be eliminated from a neighborhood-based study of this type. One solution would be to organize the collection over a larger spatial area and contact a sample of households, but this too has its problems, because then if people talk to their neighbors we would receive a high number of uninvited book donations and it would be difficult to identify whether they are from someone in our study.

The response to the book collection was overwhelming: a very simple letter from a stranger on behalf of a small unknown charity to help children in a foreign country caused

1,000 people to donate a total of 7,000 books. Some people purchased new books; others gave their treasured childhood possessions including school prizes; young children were encouraged by parents to donate; up to a dozen people went on to organize their own collections in schools, nurseries and workplaces. This demonstrates the power of a simple request: even without the pledge or the promise of publicity seven percent of those who were asked chose to give. We already know that being asked to participate is a key driver of pro-social behavior. The ask is most effective if it comes from a family member or friend but employers and faith organizations can be important mobilisers (Verba et al. 2001), as can local government (Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker 2006; Rogers 2004). Although it is likely that people will respond more enthusiastically to an invitation from someone close to them, mobilization by a university or charity can be effective: the invitation both informs the citizen of an opportunity they may not otherwise have been aware of and conveys that the organization values their contribution. The power of this type of charitable donation experiment as a research paradigm is that it is applicable to a number of other research areas: it could be used to explore requests from people with different relationships to the participant, such as friends, work colleagues, neighbors, or people in authority; to test different methods of making the request, using doorstep or telephone appeals; and to explore a variety of behavior change prompts beyond pledging and publicity appeals.

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FIGURE 1.

Letter 1 to all households

<p style="text-align: center;">Children's Book Week</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sat 27th February – Saturday 6th March 2010</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please donate a second hand book</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(in good condition, for a child of any age)</p> <p>Manchester residents are being asked to donate a book to help set up school libraries in South Africa. Millions of children in South Africa have no books and we can help by donating books we no longer want. The children's book collection is being organized by Manchester University together with Community HEART. Community HEART is a UK registered charity which supports local self-help initiatives in South Africa (registered charity no. 1052817). They collect children's books in the UK and transport them to South Africa, where they are used to set up school libraries.</p>
--

FIGURE 2.

Letter 2 to all households

<p style="text-align: center;">Children's Book Week</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Saturday 27th February – Saturday 6th March 2010</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Please donate a second hand book</p> <p>Manchester residents are being asked to donate a book to help set up school libraries in South Africa. Millions of children in South Africa have no books and we can help by donating books we no longer want. The children's book collection is being organized by Manchester University together with Community HEART (UK registered charity no. 1052817). Community HEART collects children's books in the UK and transports them to South Africa, where they are used to set up school libraries.</p> <p>Please put your book in the enclosed envelope and take it to one of the local drop-off points between Saturday 27th February and Saturday 6th March 2010.</p> <p>If you want to donate more than one book, please put them in a carrier bag, and place our envelope inside the bag. Thank you</p>

FIGURE 3. Flow diagram of the progress through the phases of the book collection RCT

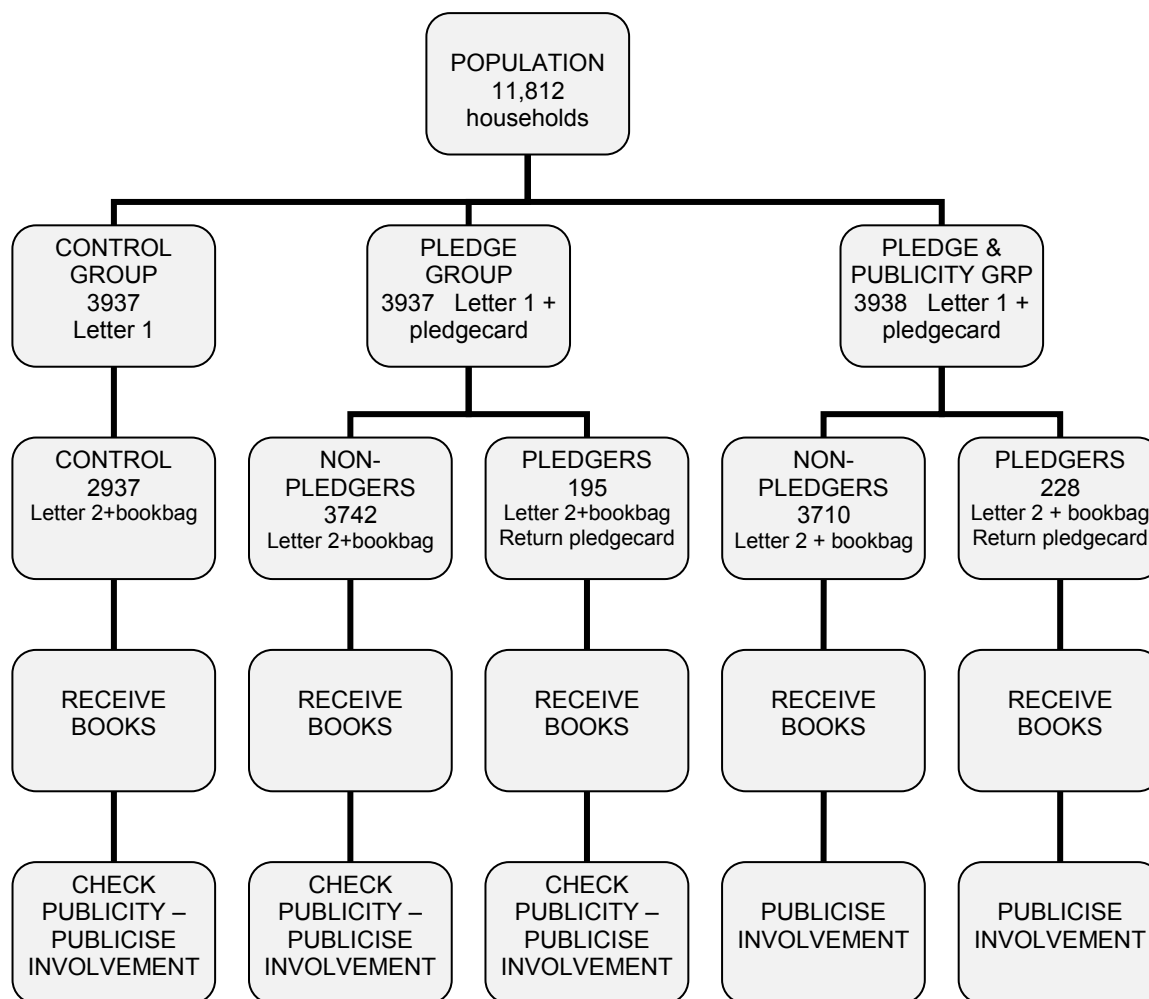


TABLE 1

Pledges made (%) by Experimental Condition (using two-group proportion tests)

	All households	Control	Pledge	Pledge & Publicity
% who made a commitment	3.6	0.1 (0.05)	5.0* (0.35)	5.8* (0.37)
N	11,812	3,937	3,937	3,938

(Standard errors in parenthesis)

* Statistically significant from control at $p < 0.05$ (z test, two-tailed)

TABLE 2

Book donations (%) by Experimental Condition (using two-group proportion tests)

	All households	Control	Pledge	Pledge & Publicity
% who donated books	8.1	7.3 (0.42)	8.2 (0.44)	8.9* (0.45)
N	11,812	3,937	3,937	3,938

(Standard errors in parenthesis)

* Statistically significant from control at $p < 0.05$ (z test, two-tailed)° Pledge & publicity group significantly different from Pledge group at $p < 0.05$ (z test, two-tailed)

TABLE 3

Complementary Log-Log Regression Results

Dependent Variable: Donated a book

	Model 1	Model 2
Pledge request only group	0.120 (0.081)	0.123 (0.081)
Pledge request plus Publicity group	0.207* (0.080)	0.210* (0.080)
Neighborhood poverty		-0.028* (0.003)
% Retired (neighborhood)		6.397* (1.402)
% Under 16 (neighborhood)		0.024 (0.227)
% Single householders (neighborhood)		-1.195 (0.620)
% Religion stated (neighborhood)		-1.224 (1.005)
_Constant	-2.581* (0.059)	-1.479* (0.725)
N	11,812	11,812
LR Chi2	6.8*	250.22*

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed tests)
(Standard errors in parenthesis)

REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY

Policy Briefing Number 10

Title: Books for Schools in South Africa: A Pledge and Publicity Campaign

Brief Description of the Project:

- A randomised controlled trial to test the effectiveness of different “nudges” in encouraging people to make charitable donations. The idea is that if people make a commitment to do something positive for society they are more likely to do it.
- Letters were sent to 12000 households in two electoral wards in Manchester asking them to donate a book to help set up school libraries in South Africa. Households were randomly assigned to one of 3 groups of equal size:
 - Pledge group. We sent a letter advertising the book collection and asking them to pledge (postcard, email or phone) a book. A few weeks later we sent a reminder letter, with details of drop-off points.
 - Pledge & Publicity group. We sent two similar letters, and in addition told households that a list of book donors would be displayed in the local drop-off points.
 - Control group. We sent two similar letters, without the pledge or the offer of publicity.
- Residents were asked to take donated books to one of six book collection points, three in each area, during Children’s Book Week, 27th Feb – 6th March 2010.
- The book collection was organised with Community Heart, a charity formed by Denis Goldberg, which takes books from the UK to set up school libraries in South Africa (UK registered charity no. 1052817).
- Afterwards, we posted the results and the names of book donors in all the local collection points, to thank donors.

Key findings

- 7000 books were donated. They are currently being sorted and packed ready to go to schools in South Africa. The books were very high quality and included books for all ages of children.
- 7.2% of the control group gave books, compared to 8.1% of the pledge group and 8.8% of the pledge & publicity group
- Asking households to pledge increased book donations from 7.2% to 8.1%, a 12.5% increase but the difference is too small to be statistically significant.
- The combined approach of asking for a pledge and promising local publicity increased book donations from 7.2% to 8.8%, a 22%** increase ($p < 0.01$).
- The response to the book collection was highest in less deprived neighbourhoods; in areas with a high proportion of retired residents and in areas with a low proportion of single person households. After taking those into account, the effect of an area having high numbers of children under 16 or a high number of religious people was not significant.

Policy Relevance and Implications:

- A pledge campaign which tells people their donation will be made public led to a 22% increase in book donations.
- A pledge and publicity campaign could potentially be applied to other situations where citizens are encouraged to adopt civic behaviour. Examples might include:
 - A pledge to undertake environmental action such as recycling, energy saving, or alternatives to car travel, followed by publicity for those who stick to the pledge.
 - A pledge to volunteer or campaign for a cause, with a promise that a list will be displayed as a thank you to those who gave their time.
 - At the neighbourhood level, a pledge to keep to tenancy agreements followed by publicity for those who stick to it.
 - A pledge to attend an annual workplace blood donation session, with a thank you list of donors displayed afterwards

Further information available from:

Sarah Cotterill, IPEG, The University of Manchester

Email: sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk

Telephone: 0161 275 0792

Date of Publication: June 2010

**LETTER 1:
PLEDGE REQUEST ONLY GROUP**

Institute for Political and Economic Governance
(IPEG)
Room 2.11 Humanities Bridgeford Street Building
The University of Manchester
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 0792
sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk

January 2010

Dear resident,

**Children's Book Week
Sat 27th February – Saturday 6th March 2010**

Please pledge to donate a second hand book
(in good condition, for a child of any age)

Manchester residents are being asked to pledge to donate a book to help set up school libraries in South Africa. Millions of children in South Africa have no books and we can help by donating a book we no longer want.

Ways to Pledge

- Post back the enclosed pledge card.
- Telephone 0161 275 0792 and leave your name & address.
- Email your name & address to sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk

The children's book collection is being organised by Manchester University together with Community HEART. Community HEART is a UK registered charity which supports local self-help initiatives in South Africa (registered charity no. 1052817). They collect children's books in the UK and transport them to South Africa, where they are used to set up school libraries.

I will contact you again nearer to Children's Book Week, with details of the local drop-off points to donate your book.

Best wishes,

Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate



WDA

**LETTER 1:
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I will contact you again nearer to Children's Book Week, with details of the local drop-off points to donate your book.

**A list of everyone who donates a
book will be displayed locally**

Best wishes,

Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate

WDB



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CONTROL GROUP**

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Best wishes,

Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate

WDC



**LETTER 2:
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- PLEDGERS**

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Room 2.11 Humanities Bridgeford Street Building
The University of Manchester
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 0792
sarah.cotterill@manchester.ac.uk

February 2010

Dear [name]

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Please **put your book in the enclosed envelope** and take it to one of the local drop-off points between Saturday 27th February and Saturday 6th March 2010.

Didsbury Library 692 Wilmslow Road Didsbury Manchester M20 2DN Open: Monday 10am–8pm Tuesday 2pm–8pm Weds Closed Thursday 10am–8pm Friday 10am–5pm Saturday 10am–5pm	Broad Oak Primary School Broad Oak Lane East Didsbury Manchester M20 5QB Open: Mon – Fri 7am – 5.30pm (Drop-off point is in entrance hall)	Crazy Cow Café 837 Wilmslow Road (near E. Didsbury station) Manchester M20 5WD Open: Mon – Fri 7.30am – 2.30pm
--	--	--

If you want to donate more than one book, please put them in a carrier bag, and place our envelope inside the bag.

Thank you,

Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate

DA2



**LETTER 2:
PLEDGE REQUEST GROUP
- NON PLEDGERS**

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Thank you,

Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate

DC2



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If you want to donate more than one book, please put them in a carrier bag, and place our envelope inside the bag.

A list of everyone who donates a book will be displayed at the drop-off points afterwards, to say thank you.

Thank you,

Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate

DB2



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Sarah Cotterill
Research Associate

DB2a



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Research Associate

DC2



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL END OF AWARD REPORT



For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. ESRC reserves the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see Section 5 of the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

Grant Reference	RES-177-25-0002		
Grant Title	Rediscovering the Civic and Achieving Better Outcomes in Public Policy		
Grant Start Date	01.09.2007	Total Amount Expended:	£664,473.11
Grant End Date	30.06.2010		
Grant holding Institution	University of Manchester		
Grant Holder	Professor Peter C. John		
Grant Holder's Contact Details	Address	Email	
	Institute of Political and Economic Governance, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, M13 9PL	Peter.john@manchester.ac.uk	
		Telephone 01612750791	
Co-Investigators (as per project application):		Institution	
Professor Gerry Stoker		University of Southampton	
Professor Graham Smith		University of Southampton	
Professor Edward Fieldhouse		University of Manchester	
Ms Elizabeth Richardson		University of Manchester	

1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

Please provide below a project summary written in non-technical language. The summary may be used by ESRC to publicise your work and should explain the aims and findings of the project. *[Max 250 words]*

The project aimed to find the most effective ways of engaging citizens so they do things for the common good.

Our survey research found that positive feelings about the neighbourhood is the main driver for civic action rather than social norms or good citizenship.

Our experiments tested whether it was more effective to nudge citizens to a desirable outcome - using a cue, feedback or a social incentive – or whether it was better to give citizens the opportunity to reflect (think) about the key social problems and thereby act. Our nudge experiments showed that a reminder and feedback can encourage citizens to recycle their waste; making their contribution public can lead them to pledge and make donations; providing information leads people to be more willing to donate their organs; and providing information about how many other people are signing a petition can encourage signing if over a million. In contrast, our deliberative on-line experiment debating youth anti-social behaviour led only to modest shifts in opinions among those who participated. An experiment to encourage organ donations showed that an information nudge in the form of a booklet has a higher impact than the booklet with deliberation in small groups.

Overall, our findings show that governments and other agencies should customise the messages they convey to citizens so as to ensure so they nudge them to achieve the best impact.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

a) Objectives

Please state the aims and objectives of your project as outlined in your proposal to the ESRC. *[Max 200 words]*

The key objective is to find out what are the most effective means to encourage active citizenship by examining a range of interventions by public bodies and by careful re-analysis of a substantial body of survey data.

The second objective is to carry out research that is applied in terms of its relevance for policy-makers, in this case to explore the link between active citizenship and policy outcomes and discover how the tools associated with effective user engagement can be improved.

The third objective is to pioneer the use of experimental and other innovative methods in the civil renewal research area. There are two types of experiment we offer to carry out: randomized control trials and design experiments.

The fourth objective is to communicate the findings back to the policy-makers and to the public, encouraged by concrete outputs connected to the co-funding, the three-monthly

meetings of the steering group, and the dissemination activities.

The fifth objective is to develop the agenda for applied social science in government and in the research community. The research is intended to be an exemplar in the field and generate the profile of applied social science.

b) Project Changes

Please describe any changes made to the original aims and objectives, and confirm that these were agreed with the ESRC. Please also detail any changes to the grant holder's institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding. *[Max 200 words]*

No changes, bar an extension to ensure we did not report during the 2010 General Election campaign period.

c) Methodology

Please describe the methodology that you employed in the project. Please also note any ethical issues that arose during the course of the work, the effects of this and any action taken. *[Max. 500 words]*

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Manchester on 22 November 2007.

Activity 1: 13,266 and 13,259 participants from the 2005 and 2007 Citizenship Surveys aggregated into 139 primary local authority areas in England and Wales. The analysis used latent regression models of core service performance growth regressed on area level social capital and voice.

Activity 2: 9,195 participants in the 2005 Citizenship Survey analysed by confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation models of the determinants of civic behaviour.

Activity 3: 194 streets (6,580 households) randomly assigned to control or treatment groups. Treatment households were visited by canvassers to encourage recycling. Recycling levels analysed by random-effects multilevel regression models.

Activity 4: 318 streets (9,082 households) randomly assigned to control and treatment groups. Treatment households received postcards giving feedback on street recycling performance. Recycling analysed by cross-classified multilevel logistic regression models.

Activity 5: 12,000 households in Manchester were randomly assigned to three groups: a letter, a letter+ pledge, letter + pledge + public recognition, each asking to donate a book to help set up school libraries in South Africa. Book contributions analysed by complementary log-log regression.

Activity 6: 4,011 British adults recruited from an online panel (not on the organ donor register) randomised into informed consent, presumed consent and mandated choice groups. Visits to

National Organ Donor Register website analysed in tables (chi-squares).

Activity 7: 180 students randomly assigned to three groups: a booklet encouraging registration, the booklet followed by a 15-minute deliberation and an information booklet about swine flu (placebo). Analysed by tables (chi-squares).

Activity 8: 668 people recruited from Oxlab's subject database randomised into control, petitions with signatories > 1 million, >100 & < 1 million, and < 100, each of which sees six petitions online. Then 185 subjects participated in a public goods experiment in the OxLab laboratory, which tested the effect of real-time social information and visibility on collective participation. Results analysed using probit or tobit regressions on stacked data with standard errors clustered by individual.

Activity 9: 6,009 participants recruited from an online panel randomly allocated to four treatment and two control groups. Two deliberation groups were invited to participate in an online discussion. Two information-only groups had access to the same boards, but were only able to post without seeing the posts of others. Treatments were information on youth anti-social behaviour and community cohesion. Pre and post treatment surveys analysed by Complier-average causal effect (CACE) models.

Activity 10: 248 councillors in eight English local authorities randomised to get strong information (t1) and weak information (t2) letters from a local community group. Responses analysed by probit models with clustered standard errors.

Activity 11: design experiment on whether moderation could be aided by the production of an audio-visual 'issue book' which would serve as a stimulus for discussion in area boards. Observation and interviews.

Activity 12: 40 citizens who called a council's contact centre were asked if they would like to find out more about how they could get involved in community issues and were monitored.

d) Project Findings

Please summarise the findings of the project, referring where appropriate to outputs recorded on *ESRC Society Today*. Any future research plans should also be identified. [Max 500 words]

Activity 1: Aggregate measures of changes civic participation and social capital do not influence the changes in the performance of local authorities (see 'Homo Civicus' paper).

Activity 2: Positive feelings about the neighbourhood has a positive effect on civic behaviour. Citizens with low levels of political trust are more likely than others to engage in civic behaviour. There is no significant effect of neighbourhood social norms and moral motivations on civic behaviour (see 'How civic is the civic culture?' paper).

Activity 3: A door-to-door canvassing campaign can raise household recycling by 10 per cent although the effect drops three months later (see JEM paper).

Activity 4: Providing feedback cards to households in a RCT raised participation in the food waste scheme by 3 percentage points, an increase of 6 per cent (see ‘The use of feedback’).

Activity 5: Book donations went up by 22 per cent as a result of people pledging to donate, and donators’ names being publicly displayed (see ‘Books for schools’ paper).

Finding 6: Opt-out and mandated choice questions generate larger numbers visiting the organ donor website as compared to opt-in systems by a small but significant margin of 5 per cent (mandated choice)/ 7 per cent (opt out)(see ‘How does choice architecture...’).

Finding 7: A comparison of the effects of nudging students to donate their organs showed the information booklet had the greatest effect, and raised the number of students on the organ donor register from 23 to 57 per cent, an increase of 17 per cent.

Finding 8: E-petitioners who know that over a million other people already signed are 6 per cent more likely to sign (see ‘Social information’ paper). Visibility had a strong effect on people’s contribution to the collective good (10 per cent), while the social information condition is not unidirectional.

Finding 9: An online deliberation RCTs shows only modest changes in policy preferences (effect sizes ranging from 0.08 to 0.8) in relation to youth anti-social behaviour and amongst participants who posted at least once on the discussion boards (see ‘Taking political deliberation online’).

Finding 10: a community interest group lobby of councillors showed an 18 per cent response to a request for help and no difference with the quality of information provided (see ‘Building links’).

Finding 11: A DVD issue book proved a novel way to bring in the voices of those who would not normally be present at organised decision-making forums (see ‘Building resilient communities’).

Finding 12: Citizens calling a call centre were asked if they were interested in civic activity and in a pilot over a short period from two neighbourhoods, 63 people said yes (see ‘How to encourage civic behaviour’).

Future plans include developing our use and application of randomised controlled trials to public policy at the Universities of Manchester and Southampton, including a bid to apply experiments to study co-production in an era of public spending restraint, and a research network at the University of Manchester.

e) Contributions to wider ESRC initiatives (eg Research Programmes or Networks)

If your project was part of a wider ESRC initiative, please describe your contributions to the initiative's objectives and activities and note any effect on your project resulting from participation. [Max. 200 words]

n/a

3. EARLY AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

a) Summary of Impacts to date

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on *ESRC Society Today*. This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. [Max. 400 words]

We reported our results to a steering committee comprised of our co-funders and experts. We created a dedicated website (www.civicbehaviour.org.uk) with findings for practitioners. We made numerous presentations to policy-makers, such as to Involve on 26 February 2009, which formed the basis of our paper published in *The Political Quarterly*. Our research has been highlighted in prominent blogs, <http://www.matthewtaylorblog.com/socialbrain/nudge-nudge-think-think/>. Media coverage included Liz Richardson speaking about pledging on Radio 4's *Analysis* Programme on 31 May 2010 and Gerry Stoker interviewed on nudge by the Radio 4 Today programme on 23 August 2010.

Our main impact comes from the final event held on 23 June 2010 at the Horseguards Hotel, London with 95 attendees from CLG, Cabinet Office, voluntary organisations, local government and academia. The event was addressed by Minister of State, Greg Clarke, who wrote to us afterwards to say, 'I have taken away with me some clear views emerging from discussion at the event, in particular about what we should be doing differently here at the centre in order to generate the trust and support need to deliver the Big Society'. The event was covered by <http://tm.mbs.ac.uk/tm-features/nudge-nudge-think-think/>; <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/2010/06/is-it-better-to-nudge-or-to-think/>.

We made numerous scientific presentations which have often preceded submissions for publication: e.g. 'Mobilising citizen effort to enhance environmental outcomes: A randomized controlled trial of a door-to-door recycling campaign. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 91: 403-410 was first presented to York Randomized Controlled Trials conference 2008; 'How civic is the civic culture? Explaining community participation using the 2005 English Citizenship Survey' forthcoming *Political Studies*, was first presented at the Political Studies Association annual meeting in 2008.

Members of the team have organised panels on experiments at our association meetings to promote the use of experiments in research, for example, at the PSA 2010 Edinburgh. The findings for the research fed into edited collections on experiments *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol 628 No 1, March 2010 (see contributions from Cotterill/Richardson, John and Stoker), and in *Local Governance, Changing Citizens* Policy Press. The ideas from the project were applied in the paper, *Motivation, Behaviour and the Microfoundations*

of Public Services by Gerry Stoker and Alice Moseley written for 2020 Public Services Commission. We made submissions to formal investigations, such as *A National Framework for Greater Citizen Engagement* 2008 and *House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee Call for Evidence: Behaviour Change* 2010.

b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. [Max. 200 words]

Our papers are being published or being submitted for publication. Key is the open-access online book, *Nudge, Nudge, Think, Think*, for Bloomsbury Academic, which will contain all our experimental findings. Bloomsbury has been doing extensive marketing of the book already through flyers and brochures.

Further scientific papers are being submitted for publication: 'Taking political deliberation online: an experimental analysis of asynchronous discussion forums' and 'Social information and political participation on the internet: an experimental approach', 'Books for schools in South Africa: a pledge and publicity campaign', 'How to encourage civic behaviour through a local authority contact centre', 'Building links between community groups and local councillors: a letter writing campaign'; 'The use of feedback to enhance environmental outcomes : a randomised controlled trial of a food waste scheme'.

Based on their findings, the project leaders are regularly invited to events that discuss citizen engagement, such as Peter John's round table role at a Communities and Local Government workshop on 16 September 2010, 'Value for money, localism and the new policy agenda'. We expect our findings to continue to feed into the policy process over the coming months as plans for the Big Society go forward.

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.

4. DECLARATIONS

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals. The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed.

Please note hard copies are NOT required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

A: To be completed by Grant Holder

Please read the following statements. Tick ONE statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section.

i) The Project

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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ii) Submissions to *ESRC Society Today*

Output and impact information has been submitted to <i>ESRC Society Today</i> . Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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OR

This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to <i>ESRC Society Today</i> as soon as they become available.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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OR

This grant is not listed on <i>ESRC Society Today</i> .	<input type="checkbox"/>
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iii) Submission of Datasets

Datasets arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the Economic and Social Data Service.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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OR

Datasets that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the Economic and Social Data Service has been notified.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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OR

No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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