

# Developing an Effective Communications Plan for Policy Advocacy

Presented by

The National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)



# Welcome to National PLACE!

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## Mission

- To educate and empower families and family-led organizations and support them to advocate for enhanced parent involvement and leadership in education, health and human services decision-making with regard to services for children and families.

## Motto

- *Advocating to ensure the parents' PLACE at decision-making tables*

# Purpose of today's presentation

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Provide an overview of components of an effective communications campaign for policy advocacy

Share specific strategies for effective communications messaging

Connect to tools and resources



# Public Policy Advocacy Campaign

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Step 1: Describe the issue

Step 2: Identify current strengths and challenges

Step 3: Identify expected and unlikely allies, and opponents

Step 4: Be clear about goals and objectives

- Short, medium, and long-term
- Process and outcomes

Step 5: Develop and implement strategies

Step 6: Monitor success/impact and adjust as necessary

# Developing a Communications Strategy and Plan

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## Components of a Communications Plan

- Goals and objectives (clear, measurable)
- Strategies (match to your target audiences)
- Tactics and tools (match to target audiences)
- Target audience identification and segmentation
- Key messages (clear, simple, concise, resonant); make the case that action is needed now; specify what people should do
- Plan measurement

# Goals and Objectives

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What do you want to accomplish? For example:

- Your organization wants to increase the policymakers in your state/community who are familiar with your mission
- Your organization wants to help the policymakers in your state/community understand a key issue that is the focus of your policy advocacy
- Your organization wants to promote a particular solution to that key issue with policymakers

# Strategies

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What specific strategies will you use to achieve your goals?

What tasks do you need to complete as part of your strategies?

What tools are available to help you meet your goals?

# SMART Strategies

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**Specific:** Conduct two briefings for reporters each quarter

- Instead of: Do better at communications with media

**Measurable:** Hold at least one constituent meeting each month

- Instead of: Meet with constituents

**Achievable:** Increase web policy page hits by 10% in 2019

- Instead of: Get 100% of constituents to click on website

**Realistic:** Develop and promote blog to x # of constituents

- Instead of: Use all methods of technology to communicate

**Timely:** Distribute report to X stakeholders by x date each year

- Instead of: Produce annual report for policymakers



- S**PECIFIC
- M**EASURABLE
- A**CHIEVABLE
- R**EALISTIC
- T**IMELY

# Communications Tools

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Remember your audience when you think about what tools to use.

Does your audience have the technology to use your potential tools?

Low-tech communications tools can be just as, if not more, effective than high-tech tools!



# Communications Tactics/Tools

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Direct mail

Flyers/posters/fact sheets

Brochures

Annual Reports

Speaking engagements

Community Meetings

Action Alerts

Newsletters

News/press releases

News conferences

Newspaper columns

Mass emails

Web sites

Social media and blogs

Podcasts/webcasts

Text message blasts

# Target Audiences & Messages

## Who are you talking to?

- What message will resonate most effectively with each intended audience?
- How can you identify common interests or characteristics to differentiate audiences?
- How can you focus your message to each audience?
- Who are the most effective messengers for each audience?

## What are you trying to say?

- What is the outcome you are trying to achieve with your message?
- What do you want your audience to understand, remember, and do?
- What is/are the message(s) you want your audience to get?
- How can you make sure your message is simple?

# Target Audience Identification

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Who are you trying to reach with your communications?

- Constituents
- Community leaders
- Partners/potential partners
- Agency policymakers (National? State? Local?)
- Elected officials (National? State? Local?)
- News media
- Others?

Who can be helpful or harmful to your efforts? Talk to them!

# Media and Audiences

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Knowing your audience will help you identify relevant messages, questions, and media outlets

Do your research on types of media and specific outlets:

- Print (Newspapers, magazines)
  - Articles
  - Op-Eds
  - Letters to the Editor
- Radio
- Television
- Digital (Websites, social media)

Specific journalists who may be interested

# Primary and Secondary Audiences

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There is potential to use one target audience to help you reach another audience (“multipliers”):

- Professional advisors
- Professional organizations
- Journalists
- Politicians
- Well-known personalities
- Special interest groups
- Religious leaders

# Key Messages

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What messages do you want to communicate?

Why do you need, and what are, key messages?

- Clearly and concisely tells who you are, what you do, and why they should care
- Helps organize your thoughts and avoid rambling
- Helps you stay on message and remember your supporting points
- Answers questions you wish had been asked
- No longer than two sentences

# How to Use Key Messages

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Repeat your key messages in all of your communications (print, broadcast, online)

Control the direction of conversations by bridging back to your key messages

When at a loss for words, go back to your key messages...they are your safe harbor

# Message Creation Checklist

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Your messages must communicate who you are, what you do, why it matters, and why people should care.

Do your messages:

- Relate back to your communication goals?
- Reflect your current communication approach?  
It's easy for messaging to become stale or outdated.
- Roll off your (or your messenger's) tongue?

# Message Creation Checklist

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Do your messages:

- Avoid industry jargon?
- Use positive language?
- Avoid repeating the myth?
- State a problem and a solution, not just one?
- Use data to back up points without being academic?
- Talk about benefits to society, not just affected children, youth or families?

# Message Creation Checklist

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Do your messages:

- Talk about results or outcomes, not just transactions or activities?
- Talk about values or beliefs?
- Tie to popular issues in your community?
- Meet people where they are?
- Use a personal story to get the point across?
- Relay a simple and clear idea?
- Use the right messengers?

# How to Engage the Media

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Identify relevant individuals within each media outlet and build a relationship with them

Take a systematic approach

Set up a media engagement chart with three columns

- Column 1: Name of media organization
- Column 2: Kind of stories carried by that outlet that overlap with your interests
- Column 3: Name of journalists associated with those stories

Contact journalists by phone or email personally and express interest in the stories s/he covers

# Be Proactive: Create News

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New policy proposals

Local community projects

New sponsorship or funding source

Open day or public event

Visit by someone in authority or someone famous

Personal achievement by one of your team

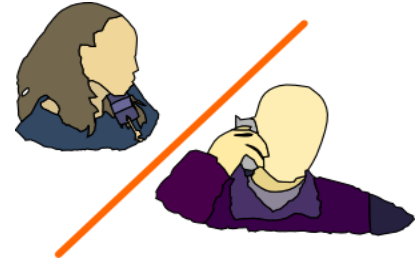
Anniversaries

Announcing future plans

Commenting on another story in the news



# Reactive Responses



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Respond promptly to any media inquiry

Always return a phone call if you say you will

Ask why they are calling, the context, and deadline

Check your facts

Do not make it up! If you don't know the answer, say you will get back to them when you find out

Never, ever lie. The truth always comes out.

# Press Releases



Written or recorded communication directed at members of the media to announce something you want reported

Target your press release to appropriate media outlets and journalists

- Only send press releases to those likely to be interested
- Prepare a list of target media; this will help decide news angle(s) and writing styles
- Write several versions with different angles if you are targeting different types of media
- Vary language and detail if necessary
- Always think about the ultimate target audience

# Constructing a Press Release

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Answer WHO, WHY, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW?

1<sup>st</sup> paragraph should be 1-2 short sentences

Detail behind main fact is further down in the main text, with the least important at the end

Include a short quote from someone relevant to the story

Do not quote anyone without checking

Include a brief statement about your organization

Make the date of issue clear to avoid confusion

Have a contact name, number, and email address

# Writing the Press Release

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Use a template with your logo and the words “PRESS RELEASE” at the top – and standard background info about your organization at the bottom

Use a standard font in 11 or 12 point

Is it embargoed or for immediate release? Always put a date

Use short sentences and paragraphs, no more than 2 double-spaced pages

Include a quote from key people if possible

Make sure it answers WHO? WHY? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? HOW?

Check spellings and grammar! Have someone else review it!

Double check names (including place names) and times

Add contact info for more details, including out-of-hours; FOLLOW UP!

# Press Release Template

PLACE LOGO HERE  
For Immediate Release  
Month Day Year

Contact: Full Name  
Office # Cell #  
Email; Website

**HEADLINE CAN BE UP TO 2 LINES LONG BOLD AND IN CAPS**  
**CAPTURES THE FRAME OF THE NEWS AND HAS A SENSE OF DRAMA**  
Subhead can provide more context and be up to 2 lines long

CITY, STATE – “The Lead” paragraph serves as a summary that communicates the most important components and outlines the issue in a way that captures attention. This paragraph doesn’t explain everything you want to share.

Each remaining paragraph contains information in descending order of importance. The most riveting information is at the top of the press release.

One or two direct, passionate quotes emphasizing the most important information should be included in the press release from key members of the organization, coalition, and/or constituents.

### [Indicates end of the press release]

*Boilerplate language goes here. It is a general description of the organization and is often in italics.*

# Photos and Photo Calls

Maintain a photo library

Organize photo calls

- Know and understand your target audience
- People make pictures come alive
- Think about clothing and facial expressions
- Think about the background
- Avoid stereotypes
- Use a professional photographer if possible
- Get consent
- Provide a caption
- Keep file sizes manageable
- Check copyright

# Op-Eds

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Check out the word count limits and guidelines for a particular outlet

Identify an appropriate messenger

Write and submit op-ed using guidelines and with the right messenger

# Letters to the Editor

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Check the LTE word count limits and guidelines for a particular outlet

Identify an appropriate messenger (lives in the distribution area if possible)

Write and submit LTE using guidelines and submitted by the right messenger

# Tips for Compelling LTE

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Own your opinion – must be signed!

Keep it short – under 200 words if possible

Start strong – startling fact, visceral image, strong statement

Use your own words

Speak your truth...make it personal

Reinforce with facts

Ask for action

## SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Editor's Name  
Editor's Address  
Date

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Dear Editor:

The opening paragraph summarizes your issue in a way that captures attention and contains a newsy or timely element, if applicable.

Explain your ties to the issue. Why are you speaking up about this? The subsequent paragraphs further explain your issue and why people should care about it. If you have data or statistics to bolster your argument, this is a good place to use them.

Follow your explanation with a call to action. What is at stake if action is not taken? What will happen if people respond with action?

Recap your point of view. Include information on how readers can get involved.

Sincerely, Name, Organization, Email, phone number

# Action Alerts

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Determine purpose and suitability

Research the situation

Identify stakeholders and decision-makers

Identify key message(s)

Use appropriate language and tone

Include all necessary content including call for action & contact information for policymakers

Circulate

# Action Alert Tips

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One page is ideal. People are more likely to read (and retain) short pieces of information.

Title should be short and to the point. It should reveal the nature of the problem. If an action alert, also include the words ACTION ALERT OR URGENT ACTION NEEDED.

Make sure the purpose is clearly stated in the opening paragraph, which should be 2-4 sentences. People are likely to read the first paragraph then skim the rest.

Keep the text brief and simple. Legislators and staff have many people competing for their limited attention. Leave white space, use color & graphics.

Give enough background information to give people confidence to respond. Organize information into “talking points.” Avoid providing too much information.

# Action Alert Tips

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Sometimes a short personal story in a side bar/text box can illustrate issue and create an emotional connection.

Always make the actionable item and deadline clear. What is it that you want the person to do? It should be very clear stated and stand out with everything they need to complete the requested action, including phone numbers, email addresses, bill numbers, sample script, deadline, etc. *Participation and success drop dramatically with each piece of information someone is asked to look up or find on their own.*

Include your organization's contact information and website.

Add references and where to go for more information on the bottom or the back page.

Consider leaving longer issue brief along with fact sheet.

Edit, edit, edit and always have a second person provide feedback.

# Plan measurement of your plan

## Measurement Matters



“What gets measured gets done.” Tom Peters

“One of the great mistakes is to judge policies and programs by their intentions rather than their results.” Milton Friedman

“Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted.” Albert Einstein

# Examples of plan measurement tools

Internal surveys

Online surveys

Web hits

Newspaper clippings

Number of news releases



# Recap Communications Plan

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Goals and objectives (clear, measurable)

Strategies (match to your target audiences)

Tactics and tools (match to target audiences)

Target audience identification and segmentation

Key messages (clear, simple, concise, resonant);  
make the case that action is needed now; specify  
what people should do

Measurement & revision of plan based on results



# Resources

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Advocacy & Communications Solutions Tools & Resources:

[www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources/)

Community Toolbox: <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents>

Non-Profit Advocacy Action Kit: [www.salsalabs.com/nonprofit-advocacy-action-kit](http://www.salsalabs.com/nonprofit-advocacy-action-kit)

Policy Development & Policy Advocacy Training Course:

[www.ndi.org/policy-development-and-advocacy-ar-en](http://www.ndi.org/policy-development-and-advocacy-ar-en)

Writing a Winning Advocacy Call to Action:

<https://info.cq.com/resources/call-to-action-formula-advocacy/>

# Upcoming Webinars

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## **June 20th : Using Social Media in Public Policy**

**Advocacy:** This webinar will walk you through a step by step process to help integrate social media into advocacy campaigns.

## **September 19th: Securing Resources for Effective Policy**

**Advocacy Campaigns:** This webinar will provide tips and strategies to secure resources to support your public policy advocacy work.

# Questions and Answers

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[www.parentsatthetable.org/join-us](http://www.parentsatthetable.org/join-us)

Access members-only resources including webinar series on public policy advocacy strategies & tools

