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Develop your Campaign's Message

The Communication Plan

A basic element of any public awareness and advocacy campaign is a communication plan with clearly defined key messages, audiences and strategies for reaching those audiences. It's important that all library staff and advocates understand the plan, its rationale and their role in supporting it.

Step 1. Define the Key Message.

Your central or key message should be one that is simply and consistently communicated, whether in a radio interview or over the backyard fence. It may be as simple as: "There is no such thing as a good education without good libraries."

The key message should be easily adapted for various audiences—parents, business people, educators or legislators. For each group, you will want to have talking points, stories and examples that address its particular needs and interests. This set of core messages will provide the basis for presentations to groups, articles in newsletters, news releases, letters to the editor and other communications. You also will want to have a clear call to action. What do you want each group to do? Be prepared to give concrete ways each group can demonstrate its support.

Step 2. Target Your Audiences.

Who can help you achieve what you want? Once you know your goal and have identified the key message, brainstorm potential audiences. For example, if your library enjoys strong support among senior citizens, they may be a primary audience for a ballot initiative on funding. Teachers and parents are vital to winning support for bigger school library budgets. Alumni may be an obvious audience for college and university libraries. If you do not have good relationships with these groups and have enough lead time, you may want to start building those relationships now.

If time is short, your funding is tight or if there is opposition by some groups, you may wish to target those who are most likely to be supportive. Don't forget to include children, who can be especially effective when delivering a message to parents, grandparents and the media.

Trying to reach everyone is a recipe for failure. Focusing your efforts on those who can help you reach your goal saves time, energy and resources—and is more likely to be successful. In most cases, the focus of your advocacy efforts will be key decision-makers—university or school administrators, Board of Education members, the city council or county commission, state and federal legislators and those who wield influence with these groups—the media, other officials (e.g., the mayor, school superintendent), community/school/campus leaders, and voters.

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In general, you will want to target those who are most likely to be supportive. For example, if your library enjoys strong support among senior citizens, they may be a key audience for a ballot initiative on funding. Teachers and parents are key to winning support for bigger school library budgets. Alumni may be a key audience for college and university libraries. Be sure to start with your internal audiences.

Here are some potential target audiences to consider when mounting your advocacy campaign.

Internal

- Staff
- Trustees
- Volunteers
- Friends

External

- Library users
- Donors and potential donors
- Elected officials
- Journalists
- Other librarians
- School board members
- Civic/neighborhood associations
- College students/alumni
- Professional associations
- Teachers/school administrators
- School children
- Faculty/administrators
- Seniors
- Business community

MAPPING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Selecting the right strategies can save time and money, as well as increase the reach and effectiveness of your message.

One-on-one communication is the most time consuming, but it is also the most powerful. Think about it. What are you most likely to remember? To Trust? Something your neighbor tells you, or a newspaper or radio ad? This is why having a network of library advocates ready and willing to speak out is invaluable.

Mass media are most effective in reaching large numbers of people. Editorial endorsements, in particular, carry great weight with both legislators and the public.

Outreach to groups—through speaking engagements, library tours or mailings—is an effective way of reaching key audiences who share particular interests and concerns.

In addition to identifying strategies, your communication plan should include a schedule for the number of contacts, e.g. number and timing of telephone calls to key leaders, news releases and public service announcements, placement of op-ed pieces, radio and TV interviews and presentations to key groups.

Consider the following when deciding which strategies to use:

- **WHO** is the audience?
- **WHAT** is the best way to convey the information to the target audience—radio, TV, direct mail, other? What kind of image do you want to project? Will it be an effective part of your total communication effort?
- **WHEN** is the deadline? Will your message be distributed in time to be effective?

- **HOW** much will it cost? Is this the most effective use of available funds?
- **WHY** is this the best strategy for this audience?

Here are some commonly used strategies for getting the message out:

- Banners/Posters/Displays
- Handouts/Giveaways
- Mailings
- Media: Newspapers, newsletters, radio, TV
- Print materials: fact sheet, newsletter, flyers, tent cards, etc.
- Web site
- E-mail lists
- Presentations to groups
- Partnerships
- Word of mouth
- Rally/kick-off party

MESSAGE WORKSHEET

What is the most important thing you want others to know? That is your key message, one that you will repeat over and over again. This message should be something you can say in conversation, in interviews or presentations to groups. It should be easy to say and remember—no more than 15 words. It may be simple as:

“Our community/campus needs a new library.” Or, “There is no such thing as good education without good libraries.”

Your key message should be used consistently in news releases, letters-to-the editor and other communications. It may also be distilled into a pithy campaign slogan.

You will also need three talking points, stories and examples that support your key message. These may change based on the needs and interests of your audience.

Use this worksheet as a guide in developing your key message and three talking points.

What is the goal?

What are your objectives? What do you want to have happen?

What is the key message (10–15 words)?

Who is the audience(s)?

Why is this important to them?

Three supporting points:

1.

2.

3.

Examples/stories/facts that support this message:

1.

2.

3.
