



The Leadership  
Conference  
Education Fund

# GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY

## SECTION 6: COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY





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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization that builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

Access this material online at [http://www.civilrights.org/action\\_center/toolkit](http://www.civilrights.org/action_center/toolkit).



The Leadership  
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Dear Friend:

This toolkit was put together with you in mind. Its purpose is to educate, equip, encourage, and empower you to make change.

Our goal is to provide you with the basic structure and strategies needed to plan and carry out an effective grassroots public education or advocacy campaign. It's possible to write an entire book on each of the areas covered in this toolkit—in fact, many have been written. But you don't have to read half a dozen books to put together a smart campaign.

What you need to do is establish your goals, create a strategy, make a step-by-step plan, and mobilize the people, partners, and resources to make it all achievable. This toolkit is meant to be a concise guide to accomplishing that. And we include plenty of suggested resources if you want more in-depth information.

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and The Leadership Conference Education Fund provide leadership and coordination to coalition efforts and support the work of national and local partners by providing strategic and

technical assistance, preparing materials, offering training, and identifying resources to support coalition efforts. Information on training for grassroots advocacy is provided by The Leadership Conference; information relating to education and coalition building is provided by The Education Fund.



We believe in the power of coalitions to bring people together for a common purpose. History shows that change can be made when diverse voices unite around a shared goal. We hope you will consider us your partners in making needed change happen. You can learn more about our work at <http://www.civilrights.org>. You can also reach The Leadership Conference field staff at 202-466-3315 or at [grassroots@civilrights.org](mailto:grassroots@civilrights.org).

Have fun!

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# The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Field Department

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights Field Department (the field team) provides grassroots consultation, advocacy coordination, support, and assistance to national, state, and local organizations regarding field campaigns around important civil and human rights issues. The team is based in Washington, D.C., with a satellite office in Atlanta, Georgia.

## Overview of National, State, and Local Work

Nationally, the field team convenes and provides field outreach and guidance to the coalition's more than 200 national civil and human rights organizations on a broad range of issues. With that focus, the field team provides field outreach and advocacy, and public education campaign guidance, on a broad range of issues.

For example, through national coalition efforts, the field team has played a role in implementation of field campaigns for legislative victories, including: the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008, the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act of 2010.

Further, when resources permit, the field team works in collaboration with local organizations to conduct national direct-service, public outreach campaigns such as the Digital Television Transition (DTV) campaign or the 2010 Census education campaign.

The field team also works throughout the country with local organizations to provide assistance and support to local coalitions' work in their communities. This support includes field outreach and advocacy,

and public education campaign guidance. The team collaborates with leaders in states including: Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Maine, Mississippi, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Texas. As just one example, in Nebraska, the field team has worked with coalitions to preserve equal opportunity, as well as judicial nominations and immigration reform education.

In concert with The Leadership Conference's policy and communications departments, the field team works proactively to create rapid response mechanisms on important federal civil and human rights issues with national coalitions in Washington D.C., and state and local coalitions in key states.

## Support Provided to National and State Coalition Members

The field department is proud to offer an array of services to both national and local partners to help support their work. These services include:

- Strategic Campaign Development, Guidance, and Execution (when applicable)
- Webinars, National Conference Calls, and Legislative Updates
- Legislative Email Action Alerts
- Trainings and Workshops on Coalition-Building, Community Outreach, Grassroots Advocacy, and Key Civil and Human Rights Issues
- Media Readiness Training (in conjunction with the Communications Department)
- Educational Material Development, Grassroots Toolkit, Resource Guides, and Fact Sheets
- Support in Organizing Press Briefings, Lobby Days, and Coalition Convenings

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# COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Communicating an effective message to the people you want to reach, directly or through the media, is an essential part of any campaign. Not every campaign will incorporate a media component, but getting your messages out through print, broadcast and the Internet are among the best ways to reach a large audience, or even a targeted one. News coverage can and should reinforce your organizing work. And many of the new forms of media—like blogs and social networks—operate as both communications and organizing vehicles and provide multiple ways to get your message out.

## Components of a Communications Strategy

In order to put together a communications plan, you need to think through a few things:

- Audience(s): Who are you trying to reach?
- What kinds of media do your audiences pay attention to? What other ways can you reach them?
- Messages: What messages will move people to take the action you want? How can you package and deliver those messages effectively through the media?
- Spokespeople: Who will be credible and effective at getting your message heard by the people you're trying to reach?
- Information and Events: What kinds of information do you have, or events can you create, that will interest the media and enable you to place stories or get your spokespeople in print or on the air?
- What are the campaign milestones that will make good stories?

## Who's Your Audience?

Your communications strategy should start with a clear sense of the audience(s) you need to reach.

Even in a public education campaign, your primary audience is most likely not the public as a whole, but some targeted subset. In any campaign you might have several sets of audiences. If you're building support for legislative action on an issue, your primary audiences might include not only legislators but also their staff, the media in their district, people whose opinions they rely on, and their constituents who share your concerns.

For example, The Education Fund worked with other public interest groups to mobilize a major public education campaign around the 2010 census. The goal of the census is to count every person in America. Of course, The Education Fund campaign couldn't possibly reach out to 300 million people in the country. Instead, The Education Fund and its allies focused on 15 cities with large populations of people who were likely to go uncounted by the census. Among hard-to-count constituencies,—The Education Fund campaign's audience—were racial and ethnic minorities, people with limited English proficiency, people with disabilities, low-income families and children. The campaign focused its organizing and media strategies to maximize the outreach to these defined groups of people.

## How Can You Reach Them?

Once you have identified your primary audiences, make a list of the different ways you can reach them. Your media list could include "mainstream media"—such as the daily paper and local TV stations—as well as weeklies like neighborhood papers and publications targeted to specific audiences such as African Americans or Latinos. What radio stations are most popular in your target communities, and what kind of local news or community affairs programs might interview your spokespeople? Are

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Media is just one way to reach your audiences. See the "[Organizing Your Community](#)" and "[Using New Media](#)" sections for discussion about reaching audiences through in-person and online organizing strategies.

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there major churches with newsletters that cover community affairs? Don't overlook newspapers and broadcast outlets that are in languages other than English. And don't forget the Internet; most areas now have websites and bloggers that cover community affairs and local politics. Many of them have influential audiences, which include mainstream journalists.

Once you've made a list of news outlets you want to reach, figure out the key people you need to reach. If you or the organizations in your coalition don't already have contacts in the media, you can build your own list including:

- Newspaper reporters who cover the issue you're working on.
- The reporter who covers your area for the Associated Press news service (<http://www.ap.org>).
- Columnists who write about politics or community affairs.
- Producers for local television and radio news.
- News anchors and reporters who cover public affairs.

If you don't know the right person to talk to at a particular outlet, call the news room or assignment editor and ask who covers your issue.

## What's Your Message?

Messaging will be the heart of your communications campaign. A public education and advocacy campaign has to educate people and motivate them to take some sort of action. Your messages should accomplish both. Once you have refined your

messages, get everyone involved in your campaign to use them. Repetition is key to a message sinking in.

Develop a short list of main messages—the key points you want to get to your audiences. Developing effective messages is as much art as science. But it's not rocket science. Here are some characteristics of good messaging.

### **Short and simple**

Prepare a short list of key campaign messages or talking points. If you have several different audiences, you might also have one or two special messages for those audiences. Each message should be short enough for a speaker to remember and repeat easily, and for a listener to understand and remember.

### **Inspiring and motivating**

Ground your messages in the values and priorities of the people you are trying to reach. Your main messages should let people know how taking action in your campaign will help them advance their values and help them bring about the kind of community and country they want to live in.

### **Avoid wonkery**

Avoid jargon, overly technical terms, or acronyms that will mean more to insiders than to your audience generally. Also avoid having your main messages get too far into the details of a policy proposal. You'll need to explain those details, of course, but the main messages should get a sense of the change you want to make and the values you want to advance.

For example, if you were running a campaign to boost state support for nutrition programs for people living below the poverty level by 20 percent, or you are trying to make a complicated policy change that



## don't overlook bloggers when putting together your media list

*Some bloggers, including those run by news operations, function primarily as extensions of the newspaper, even though writing for blogs is usually less formal. You should treat them as news organizations. Many cities and states have independent blogs that cover politics and have influential readerships that include other journalists. Try to establish a relationship with them. Some other bloggers view themselves more as advocates and political organizers. You might want to identify some advocacy blogs that write about your issue and invite them into your campaign strategy; they may want to be part of your campaign plan for getting your message out to the online community. A little time spent reading a local blog should help you figure out what angle they take on issues.*

will expand the availability of breakfast programs for children of poor families, your main messages might be something along these lines:

- We can build stronger communities by building healthier families.
- Schools work better and students learn more when children have a healthy breakfast.

### **Tell stories**

Find ways to illustrate your main messages with stories that put a human face on them. Personal stories can be more effective than policy language or political rhetoric at helping people understand what is at stake and how your campaign will make a difference in people's lives. Be sure to make a clear link between your story and your message.

Here's how a campaign spokesperson might link a story to a campaign message:

*I've been a teacher for 15 years. I know from personal experience that students who come to school without a decent breakfast have a harder time concentrating. That makes them more likely to be distracted, and to distract other students. It's one more barrier to learning for children who face a lot of them. Schools work better and students learn more when children have a healthy breakfast. In my experience, it's a great investment.*

### **Test your messages**

It's always a good idea to get some feedback on your intended messaging from people who are part of the audiences you are trying to reach.

In a formal focus group, a company with expertise in public opinion research identifies a pool of people who meet your audience criteria and invites them to spend 90 minutes or two hours participating in a focused conversation. Participants are paid for their time, typically \$75 or \$100. You and your colleagues can watch from behind a one-way mirror while a trained moderator leads a small group discussion among eight or 10 people. A good focus group can help you understand not only the positions people take but the values, emotions, hopes, and fears that underlie those positions. A focus group will also give you some subjective reactions to draft messages and materials. A good moderator will be able to probe beyond positive or negative reactions to ask questions like, "Why didn't you like that?" "What about that

ad did not sit well with you?" "Why don't you think that was convincing?" While formal focus groups can be extremely useful, you do have to remember that it's still one small group of people and you can't treat their reactions as necessarily indicative of your audience as a whole. You generally don't want to limit yourself to just one group because dynamics can be strongly influenced by particular personalities in any given group. Some companies now do interactive focus groups online, where people look at and evaluate materials that are presented on their computer.

If you don't have the budget (several thousand dollars per group) to conduct formal focus groups, you can get useful feedback on messaging and materials with informal focus groups. Ask members of your coalition to identify a few people who would be willing to have a conversation over lunch. Or identify a church or community group that would be willing to host a conversation with some of its members. Present your draft messages, show them draft campaign materials, and encourage honest feedback. Have someone who is good at engaging people in conversation act as a moderator, probing for more than one-word answers.

### **Polling**

If your campaign is going to invest a lot of money in advertising or other public outreach, it may be worth investing in some polling to find out where the public (or the part of the public you are trying to reach) stands on an issue and test the effectiveness of some of your messages. Polling doesn't allow for the same kind of give-and-take that focus groups can, but a properly run poll can give you a more reliable sense of the positions and opinions of a particular subset of the public. Some polling is designed to help you shape your message. Other poll results may themselves become part of your message: "More than 60 percent of our state's residents believe this change is needed. Why are our elected officials standing in the way?"

You can also try to get information from a targeted group of people by using an online tool such as Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>), which allows you to create free online surveys. It won't give you the same kind of scientific data that a professional poll will, but you can get useful information by creating an online survey and find

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a way to get members of your target audience to complete it. (It also lets them give you anonymous feedback that may be more honest.)

## Identify Spokespeople

It's a good idea to have a handful of spokespeople who can convincingly communicate and reinforce your campaign messages. Your spokespeople should be:

- Considered credible, likable, and trustworthy by you, the media, and your audience.
- Willing to be team players and stick to your campaign plan and messages.
- Have experience working with the media or are willing to spend time learning and practicing how to do it well.
- Are willing to commit time to appearing at public events or speaking with reporters.

The news media is often interested in "unexpected allies." So you may try to include people who might be viewed more typically as adversaries on a particular issue, such as a union official and a business leader, or political figures from different parties. You might demonstrate a breadth of community support by including religious leaders from different faiths or denominations.

## Dealing with the Media

It's a tough time to be a journalist. The news industry is going through its own economic downturn, and fewer reporters are being asked to do more work. Your goal is to establish a relationship that gets

reporters to start thinking of you as a resource who can help them get their job done. You should:

- Provide them with useful information or help them find it.
- Return their phone calls or emails quickly.
- Find out what their deadlines are and do everything you can to meet them.
- Learn what kind of stories they write or produce, figure out angles that will work for them, pitch them on the idea, and put them in touch with people they need to talk to.

If a reporter asks for information "on background" or "off the record," be sure you know exactly what he or she means by those ground rules. **Background** generally means the reporter can use the information without attributing it to you. **Off the record** means that you're giving information that can't be used in a story. You can't apply these retroactively—by telling a reporter something and then saying, "That's off the record!" It doesn't work that way.

Most of the time, you should stay on record with a reporter. One exception might be to ask to speak on background if you want to be able to have a conversation and talk freely without making sure every sentence is put together well. You could suggest that the conversation be on background, and that at the end of the conversation you can give on the record quotes in answer to any particular question.

## Grabbing the Media's Interest

### *What makes a good story?*

As you develop a media outreach plan, keep reporters' needs in mind. A reporter needs to be able to provide readers with important information and tell a good story. And television producers or reporters need good visuals to go with any story. Here are some elements of a good story that can help you get reporters interested:

- Reasons to care—how can the story make an impact on people and the community.
- Good messengers—spokespeople are interesting or compelling.
- A particular angle or niche—a specific detail is a good way into a story, such as the number of people served by a local health clinic.



*Be aware that conflict and controversy are often good stories from the media's perspective. If a reporter invites you to start or fuel a conflict, be thoughtful about how you want the story to be framed. Will fostering the conflict be helpful to your message or will it distract from the focus you want the story to have?*

- Something specific to the calendar—a relevant anniversary, an important deadline for qualifying for federal assistance, etc.
- Making “news”—launching a campaign, releasing a report, calling for an official investigation.
- Good visuals—especially for TV.
- Ease of coverage—make journalists’ jobs easier by offering clear information, compelling spokespeople, and quick responses to any questions.

### **“Pitching” Journalists**

Your “pitch” is what you tell a journalist to generate interest in covering your campaign generally or a specific event. It should be short and to the point. It should take into account a journalists’ need for news and a good story. Before you pick up the phone, write down your pitch and practice saying it until it sounds natural and conversational. If you have the time, it’s a good idea to read or watch some of that reporter’s work to get a feel for what interests them and how they approach a story, and demonstrate that you’re familiar with a journalist’s work when you’re on the phone. If you have a hard time reaching a journalist on the phone, you can put your pitch in a written memo.

Here’s an example of what a short pitch script might look like:

*Hi, Mark, this is Sheila Jackson from the Community Needs Coalition. I’ve seen your coverage of affordable housing issues, and I wanted to let you know that the 2010 census will have a big impact on local housing funds. Rev. Susan Schmidt, who you’ve spoken with in the past, is helping lead a new coalition effort to make sure everybody in our city gets counted, which has a direct effect on grant funding for housing. She’ll be speaking at a press conference on Wednesday and would be happy to talk with you about the new campaign. Can I send you some more information? Would you be interested in attending the press conference?*

Be persistent, but polite. Don’t be afraid to push a little if a reporter doesn’t immediately show interest, but also respect that a reporter may be in the middle of something urgent. Don’t take it personally if you get a quick “no”. Pitching in the morning is usually best for reporters’ schedules.

Keep detailed records of all your conversations with reporters so you can refer to them the next time you’re ready to reach out.

## **Making the Most Your of Interview Opportunities**

### ***Stay on message***

Always know what you’re going to say before talking to a reporter. This means knowing your campaign’s messages and practicing them until you can say them easily and naturally. If a reporter asks you a question that seems off-topic, or wants you to comment on something you’re not ready to talk about, you don’t have to answer their question directly. You can deflect it and get back to one of the main messages you want to get out. Don’t worry about being repetitive—repetition is key to getting your message to sink in.

### ***Don’t ramble***

Keep your sentences short and direct and stop when you’ve said what you want to say. Some reporters use silence to get you to ramble. Don’t be afraid to stop and wait for them to ask the next question.

Reporters will often end an interview with a sort of wrap-up question such as, “Do you have anything else to say?” Use this as an opportunity to repeat your basic message as you’d like it to be used.

### ***Take time if you need it***

If a reporter calls with a few questions, it’s OK to take a little time to collect your thoughts. You can ask a reporter what kinds of things they want to talk about, and ask if you can call back in a few minutes. Then you can think about your main points, write out a few sentences if it will help you be clear about what you want to say, and then call back. The basic goal is to know what you’re going to say before you say it.

### ***Always tell the truth—never fake it***

If you give false information to a reporter, you and your campaign will have a hard time regaining credibility. If you’re asked about anything that you don’t know the answer to, don’t make it up. Just say, “I’m not sure about that detail, but I’ll find out and get back to you.” And then be sure to follow up.

### ***Be friendly, but not a friend***

You should assume that anything you say to a reporter could end up in print or on the air. Be careful about a reporter asking casually, “What do you really

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think?” kinds of questions after a formal interview seems over. You don’t want to create an “interesting” story that would distract from your main message. The same goes for communicating by email. Don’t be lulled by informal communication and write something you’d be unhappy to see in a column or blog post.

## Holding a Press Conference

You don’t have to have a press conference to talk to reporters. If you have information you want to share, you can just send it and follow up with a phone call. You can invite media to cover events where actual campaign activity is taking place, such as a public rally, debate, or canvassing campaign. Only hold a news conference when you are releasing information that is new or important enough to be considered news by reporters, when you can present a great visual (such as a big group of supporters), or you have speakers who by their own position or celebrity will draw reporters to you.

If you decide to hold a press conference:

- Pick a time and location that is convenient for reporters.
- Reserve the room or get any necessary permits for an event on public property.
- Make sure the space is accessible for people with disabilities.
- Email a media advisory a few days before the event.
- Follow up in the days before the event with phone calls “pitching” the event to reporters—practice your pitch so you can quickly and convincingly describe the event, the news, and if appropriate, the good stories and visual images that will be available.
- Think about the visual that your speakers and supporters will present. Will they show the diversity and breadth of your coalition?

Among the basics you might need:

- Podium.
- Sound system, microphones, and an audio multibox for TV or radio reporters.
- Campaign banner or other visual backdrop.
- Water for the speakers.

- Materials that will make it easier for reporters to get the story right: a press release for the event, a short paragraph identifying each of the speakers, written copies of speakers’ remarks, and whatever campaign materials or background information that will help explain the issue and the campaign.

Don’t let your press conference drag on. You don’t want reporters to lose interest or feel like you’re wasting their time. Aim for a few speakers (ideally no more than four, with the most well-known or newsworthy speaking last) each talking for a few minutes, so that you get from presentations to reporters’ questions in 15 or 20 minutes. It can be challenging to enforce that kind of discipline if you have a large coalition, but it’s better to create more speaking opportunities rather than trying to pack too many speakers into one event. Other leaders can stand behind the speakers to create a good image of a campaign with broad support.

Prepare for a press conference by getting agreement in advance on the order of speakers, what topic each will cover, and avoiding repetition. Have a moderator begin with short welcoming remarks, identifying who the speakers are, and describing how the press conference will work. The moderator should also call the press conference to a close after an agreed-upon amount of time or when questions have trailed off.

## tip for pitching

**Assume reporters are busy and respect their schedules.**

*Start a call by asking, “Are you on deadline?” If the answer is yes, ask for a good time to call back. Reporters are more likely to be on deadline and less likely to be able to talk to you in mid- to late afternoon. Morning or early evening calls are a better bet.*

**Be prepared.**

*You won’t have a lot of time to make your pitch. Practice your delivery so that you can make your points quickly and smoothly. And have background information or detailed data at your fingertips in case the reporter starts asking questions.*

Plan to record your own event with a digital video recorder if possible. That way you'll be able to create your own news by putting the event or edited highlights on the website and send it to local bloggers and news outlets. The same goes for taking still photographs.

After the press conference, send the press release and other materials to reporters who did not make it to the event and follow up with phone calls offering them the opportunity to speak with one or more of the speakers.

### Holding a Telephone Press Conference

A telephone press conference can be a great alternative to a traditional press conference. Among the benefits of a teleconference: you don't need to find (or rent) a location and get it ready; speakers from different parts of your state can participate without

traveling; it's easier for reporters to cover the event while working at their desks; and you can reach out to reporters from a broader area, including other parts of your state or nationally. The main drawback to a teleconference is that you won't get television coverage or an opportunity to make your own videos of the event.

The planning process for a teleconference is much the same as with a traditional press conference:

- Pick your speakers carefully.
- Be sure your speakers are prepared (ideally, your speakers will do a practice run-through of their planned remarks before the call).
- Promote the teleconference with a media advisory followed up with phone calls.
- Record the event for your own use with a digital audio recorder or ask the teleconferencing



*People who will be representing your campaign on television should either have experience doing television or be willing to spend some time preparing. At a minimum, practice for a television interview with a video camera (or in front of a mirror) until you feel confident making your main points without stumbling. Some tips for television:*

- *Keep your answers short. Practice getting your campaign's primary messages across in short, simple sentences. Include only as much detail as you need to answer the question or get your point across.*
- *Smile! A huge part of how people take in information from television is visual—what you say may leave less of an impression than how you say it. You want to come across as likeable, knowledgeable, comfortable, and enthusiastic about your campaign. A big smile might feel unnatural but it will keep you from coming across as angry or sulking.*
- *Keep your cool if the conversation gets contentious or unpleasant.*
- *Posture and eye contact. If you're standing and talking to a reporter while being filmed by a cameraman, look at and talk to the reporter. If you're in a studio being interviewed by someone in another location, look directly into the camera. If you're seated, don't lean or slump back in your chair: leaning slightly forward will give you much better energy and look better on camera. Keep hand gestures to a minimum, and keep them away from your face.*
- *Dress for success. Wear clothes that are appropriate for the setting. If you're being interviewed on a news program, wear business dress in solid colors. If you're being interviewed in a field setting, it may be appropriate to be dressed more casually. In either case, you don't want flashy patterns, jewelry, or accessories to distract attention from you and your message.*
- *Don't ever assume that the camera or microphone is off.*

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service to record it for you and/or provide a transcript. Follow up with reporters who joined the call to see if they have any other questions.

- Contact reporters who don't cover the event and offer to send them copies of the report released or audio files of the presentations.

If you expect just a few participants, you could use a standard conference call number, where everyone calls in and can speak and be heard by others. However, there are real downsides to an open conference call, including background noise from other callers, the disruption of "hold music" if one of the callers puts the conference on hold, and a lack of control over questions. Commercial services can set up moderated calls that give you complete control over the question and answer session.

*See the "Organizing Your Community" section of this toolkit for more information on these services.*

At the start of the teleconference, you or the operator should welcome the callers and describe the process you'll be using. Identify the speakers and explain the process for taking questions. Ask speakers to introduce themselves as they begin speaking or answering questions. When you are ready to end the call, thank everyone for participating and let reporters know who they should call if they have additional questions. Follow up the same way you would with a regular press conference: send information to those who didn't make it, and ask those who did whether there's anything else they need.

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## Sample Messages and Talking Points

### **Major Messages and Talking Points for Census Outreach Campaigns**

Our communities have a lot to gain or lose in the 2010 census.  
We need to make sure everyone is counted.

- The federal government uses census information to decide where and how to spend almost \$400 billion every year on health, education, transportation, and more.
- State governments use census information to decide which communities need money, and what kind of nonprofit services to support.
- Businesses use information to decide where to invest in new factories, distribution centers, and stores.
- Every person who goes uncounted could cost our community thousands of dollars a year. If a lot of people don't get counted, we could lose out on millions that our communities need and deserve. It could make the difference between getting or losing a school, health clinic, senior center, or job training site.
- Census information is also the basis for political representation. Census counts are used to decide how many representatives each state gets in Congress and how those districts are defined. States use the same information to draw legislative districts.
- Communities where people don't get counted will lose political representation and influence to communities where everyone does get counted.

## Media Advisory

A media advisory is a document used to invite reporters to cover some kind of event, such as a press conference, forum, or rally. A media advisory should be short and to the point.

The goal of any advisory is to make the event sound interesting, newsworthy, and easy for reporters to quickly figure out the details. Give some thought to the visuals that could make it more appealing for a television reporter or news photographer to cover—and spell them out. You can use a media advisory to let people know about a formal event, like a news conference, or something less formal, like the fact that campaign activists will be working the crowd at a street fair or community event. Here’s an example.

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### Sample Media Advisory for an Event

#### **MEDIA ADVISORY**

##### Community Leaders to Launch ‘Make Yourself Count’ Campaign Billions at Stake for X City

With billions of dollars and X City’s political representation for the next decade at stake, a group of business, labor, civic, and religious leaders will launch an intensive grassroots campaign to make sure every resident is counted in the 2010 census. City leaders will cut a ceremonial ribbon to launch the campaign.

**What:** Press conference to launch ‘Make Yourself Count’ Campaign

**Who:** Dr. Jane Doe, Community Health Clinic  
Bill Smith, Teacher, Eastern High School  
Joe Washington, City Labor Council  
Rev. Sue Rodriguez, City Ministerial Alliance

**When:** Tuesday, October 10th at 10:00 a.m.

**Where:** City Hall steps (rain location—City Hall Room 210)

**Why:** Launch campaign for 100 percent participation in 2010 census, discuss stakes for city residents in a complete count, and talk about campaign strategies for overcoming challenges to a full count.

For more information, contact Joe Johns at 222-222-2222.

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## Press Release

A press release is a document that tells the story about an event, report, or news item. One trick to writing a press release is to pretend that you're writing the story you would like to read in the paper the next day. Start with the news that you're making, include quotes from one or more of your

spokespeople close to the beginning, and be sure to include the most important messages you want people to hear. You don't have to include every detail. A press release should be short enough (usually one page) for reporters to quickly get your key messages. You can provide more background in a fact sheet or in a conversation.

## Sample Press Release for an Event

For Immediate Release

For more information, contact: Joe Johns, 222-222-2222

October 10, 2010

joe@makecitycount.org

### Community Leaders Launch Campaign to Make Sure Every Resident is Counted in 2010 Census

Diverse group of leaders, organizations pledge intense campaign  
to protect the city's economic and political interest in a complete count

A diverse coalition of X-City leaders today announced a coordinated campaign to make sure that everyone is counted in the 2010 census. At stake is billions of dollars in resources for X-City communities and fair representation in Congress and the state legislature.

"This is a chance we only get once every 10 years, so let's get it right," said Dr. Jane Doe, director of Community Health Clinic. "We all have a lot to gain by getting a complete count, and a lot to lose if we don't. That's why we're coming together to tell every resident to complete the census form and make themselves count."

Rev. Sue Rodriguez, head of the United for Justice Coalition, said the campaign will work through schools, churches, social service providers, neighborhood associations, and other community groups. She urged residents to see the census as a chance to do something powerful for the health of City families, schools, and neighborhoods.

"Many people don't know how much is riding on the census," said Smith, "We're out to change that. We want everyone to understand that for every person who goes uncounted, we lose political influence in the state capital and Washington, and we lose resources that make a difference in the lives of all of us. Everyone can take a little time to take care of themselves and take care of our community."

The census is carried out every 10 years as required by the U.S. Constitution. The information it gathers about individuals and households is used to determine how many representatives each state gets in Congress and to draw congressional and state legislative district lines. In addition, census data is used to allocate almost \$400 billion a year in federal funds and billions more in state funds.

Campaign spokesperson John Washington said the Make it Count campaign will deal head-on with some residents' concerns about giving information about themselves and their families to the census bureau. Washington noted that anyone who returns their census form by April 1 will save themselves a phone call or visit from the Census Bureau.



**on press  
releases**

*Approach your release as a reporter would. The fact that your group is putting out a report isn't news—it's what your report has to say. So your headline and opening sentence should not start with "Local group releases new report" but "New report documents urgent need for . . ."*

## Letters to the Editor

One of the most widely read sections of any newspaper is the page featuring letters to the editor. The letters page is a great way for your campaign to get its message out. Most papers print short letters, so you're better off if you can get your message across in fewer than 200 words. Letters are more likely to be printed if they are responding to an event or a story that ran in the paper.

Keep an eye out for news stories on topics that are relevant to your issue, and respond regularly. For example, with the census:

- If there's a story about people without access to health care, you can point out that federal and state

health funds will be distributed to communities based on census figures.

- If there's a story about school funding, or the poor condition of local roads, that gives you an opportunity to point out that funding for key services and infrastructure are based on population figures from the census.

You don't have to complain about coverage to get printed—you can use a letter to the editor to reinforce a good story and get its messages into the paper one more time. Most papers don't want to run a lot of letters from the same person, so encourage different community leaders and advocates to write letters.

## Sample Letters to the Editors

To the Editor:

The recent story on cuts to city services ("State budget cuts slam city coffers," January 10) makes it clear why the upcoming census is so important. Every resident who goes uncounted will cost the city thousands of dollars in federal and state funding every year for the next 10 years. If a thousand people go uncounted, we'll lose out on millions of dollars for schools, job training, health care or transportation. There are millions of reasons to fill out your census questionnaire when it comes in the mail this spring, and no good reason not to.

Joe Doe

To the Editor:

Your story about the recession's toll on people without a high school diploma demonstrates the importance of doing everything we can to lower dropout rates and address the inequities that lead to lowered graduation rates that have lasting and damaging effects on communities of color. The Campaign for High School Equity is a national coalition that has identified the most important policy priorities that must be addressed if our high schools are going to change enough to make sure that all young people graduate from high school ready to work, ready for college, and ready to be knowledgeable citizens. It's time for our legislators to make it happen.

Julia Esquivel

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## Resources

- The Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart for Assessing Communications, from Spitfire Strategies:  
<http://www.spitfirestrategies.com>
- Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-by-Step Guide to Working with the Media, by Kathy Bonk, Emily Tynes, Henry Griggs, and Phil Sparks. Published by the Communications Consortium Media Center:  
<http://www.ccmc.org>
- SPIN Works! A Media Guidebook for Communicating Values and Shaping Public Opinion, by Robert Bray, and other publications on communications strategy:  
<http://www.spinproject.org>

