



The Leadership  
Conference  
Education Fund

# GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY

## SECTION 7: USING NEW MEDIA





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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 Conference Education Fund

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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!

Ellen Buchman  
Vice President, Field Operations  
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The Leadership Conference Education Fund



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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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# USING NEW MEDIA

**N**ew Media is a broad term used to describe the ever-growing array of interactive communications, networking, and organizing activities that take place electronically over digital technologies like the Internet and smart phones. Among the key characteristics of the changing new media environment are democratization and interactivity.

There are fairly low barriers for individuals, organizations, or campaigns to produce and share material and build and engage networks of friends and supporters. And the flow of information is no longer a one-way street from publisher to consumer but a robust and widening sharing of information, opinion, and opportunities for engagement.

New media technologies provide organizations with inexpensive ways to reach out to target audiences as well as to their own networks and the much wider universe of people who read their news, enjoy their entertainment, and conduct their activism online. New media blurs and sometimes erases the lines between what we think of as news outlets and what we think of advocacy, community building, and political organizing.

Social networking sites like Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>), Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>), Myspace (<http://www.myspace.com>), Gather (<http://www.gather.com>) and others provide opportunities to create and build powerful communities of support for your campaign. Facebook, for example, has more than 160 million users in the United States and more than 500 million worldwide. At the end of 2010, Twitter had more than 175 million active users and was growing by millions each month.

The potential impact of new media technologies is immense. The wide availability of digital video, from everything from security cameras to cell phones, has made it easier for law enforcement authorities to identify criminal suspects and seek public assistance in finding them, but has also proven to be a powerful tool that individuals can use to document and expose unacceptable behavior by law enforcement officials

and demand accountability. Political protestors in Iran have used Twitter and YouTube to circumvent their government's control of media and to document violent crackdowns on dissent.

## **Using New Media to Advance Your Campaign**

### ***A Campaign Website***

Creating a website is an important first step to building an online presence. People who read about your campaign in the newspaper or hear about it from one of their friends can find your website through a search engine and learn more about the campaign. It's a place to post campaign materials, sign up volunteers, give activists steps to take, and solicit financial contributions. The complexity of your website will depend on the size and scope of your campaign, and whether you're using the site to recruit and manage contact with your supporters. The costs of setting up a basic website are pretty minimal. You could even create a campaign page on an existing organizational website.

Some guidelines for an effective website:

- Give some creative thought to your campaign graphics and make sure your home page is attractive, engaging, and very quickly gives people a clear sense of what your campaign is about. Cover the basics: who you are, what your mission and goals are, what kind of activities you're engaged in, and what individuals can do to make a difference.
- Designate someone to update the website regularly with news about the campaign and the issue it is addressing, short notes from the campaign manager, interviews with activists about why they are volunteering, videos taken from campaign events or trainings, etc.
- Make it easy for people to get involved with very clear ways to join the campaign, pledge their support or sign a petition, or report contact with a targeted public official. And don't forget to make it easy for people to donate.



For basic, easy to use, and very affordable website options, check out Weebly at <http://www.weebly.com> or Tripod at <http://www.tripod.lycos.com/site-building>. For affordable web hosting, check out <http://www.dreamhost.com/hosting.html>.

**Join the Blogosphere**

A blog is generally less formal and more interactive than a website. It's a place where you and your colleagues can share breaking news relevant to your campaign, post updates about events and campaign milestones, interact with volunteers, and generally build enthusiasm for the campaign. It will take someone's time to keep the blog updated, to monitor readers' comments if you set up your site to allow them, and to respond as necessary to comments from supporters or opponents. If you permit readers to post comments, you'll need to have a policy in place to deal with offensive comments. Some sites require users to register to discourage destructive anonymous commenting. You can sign up for a free, easy-to-use blogging platform at <http://www.wordpress.com> or <http://www.blogger.com>.

In addition, identify knowledgeable and effective bloggers who are activists on the issue you are working on. Think about reaching out to them in the early stages of your campaign, and invite them to help you plan the online portion of our outreach and organizing strategies. Getting interest and attention from a blogger who already has a significant readership of people interested in your issues can help you make a big splash quickly. You can reach a wide readership much more quickly by getting attention (or writing your own guest post) on a blog with an established audience than by building your own blog audience from scratch.

**Create a social network presence**

Facebook is the largest social networking site in America. The odds are that many of your own board, staff, coalition partners, and campaign allies are on Facebook and other social networking sites, and you should be too. Think of a campaign page on Facebook as an extension of your website, with an important difference: people won't have to come to your site to get information. Once they've signed us as a member or fan of your campaign, any new information or requests for action that you post will appear on their own pages. If they take an action you recommend, their other friends will find out about it too. With some

creative thinking about your messaging you can build a large network of friends and friends of friends. Learn more about Facebook organization pages at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/learn.php>. Other major social networking sites include: Care2, Change.org, Ning, and Myspace.

Consider taking another step and creating a Twitter account. Twitter takes you one more step into an active conversation with people who are interested in your cause or campaign. You create a Twitter account and let your members and supporters know about it so they can sign up to follow the messages you send out. The most notable feature of Twitter is that the size of your "tweets," or messages, is limited to 140 characters. Your short messages or tweets will reach your followers online or through text messages to their cell phones. Your goal is to build your number of followers and keep them engaged with interesting, entertaining, empowering and up-to-the-minute news about your campaign and calls for urgent action. There's an art to sending out short tweets that grab people's attention, encourage them to "retweet" to their own networks. They can link back to your latest video or call for action.

**Tweeting for change**

Here are some online tools for effective Twitter advocacy:

For petitions:  
<http://act.ly>

For following and communicating with members of Congress:  
<http://tweetcongress.org/>

For following and indentifying influential progressive voices on Twitter:  
<http://tweetprogress.us/>

One great feature in Twitter is called a “hashtag”. These are used to identify a topic on Twitter to help people follow what others are posting on the topic. Hashtags start with a “#” (hash) sign. For example, people following comprehensive immigration reform will use #CIR as a hashtag and follow messages on that topic at <http://hashtags.org/cir>. Tools such as <http://www.hashtag.org> can help you search for and monitor Twitter hashtags. Learn more at <http://help.twitter.com/forums/10711/entries/49309> and <http://mashable.com/2009/05/17/twitter-hashtags/>.

## Reaching Out to Online Media

Major newspapers have both websites, which are essentially online versions of the daily paper, and blogs, which give their reporters a chance to write and comment quickly and often more informally about topics they normally cover. Two of the biggest are, not surprisingly, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. But just about any town or city with a local paper will also have an online version.

Reporters are often doing double duty, writing standard news stories for the newspaper and looking for quicker tidbits for the blog. When you reach out to blogs and bloggers who are associated with mainstream journalism outlets—newspapers or magazines—you should treat them as you would other journalists. Introduce yourself and your campaign, encourage them to cover you and consider you a source. Pass along anecdotes, bits of inside information, and other material that might not make it into a straight news story but will help them fill out the blog.

*See more about guidelines for talking with and working with members of the media in the “Communicating Effectively” section of this toolkit.*

Many blogs that are not affiliated with major news organizations also function at least partially as news organizations, producing or compiling links to other news organizations. But they also include a lot of commentary and provide opportunities for you to reach their audiences by posting op eds or getting one or more of their current contributors to write about your campaign. Huffington Post, a leading site in this category, attracts huge numbers of readers.

Other blogs are organized around political ideologies or specific issues. One of the best-known progressive political blogs is <http://www.dailykos.com>, a website

where people can read, comment, and debate on the news of the day and follow a dizzying number of comment streams. Daily Kos has “spun off” other blogs devoted to specific topic areas. Whatever issue you are focused on, there are almost certainly some major blogs, some associated with advocacy organizations and others run by individual activists. There are well-read blogs focusing on communities of color, people with disabilities, LGBT advocacy and politics, and more. Many state capitals and other urban areas have influential blogs covering state and local politics and community affairs. Among their readers will be people you are trying to influence: journalists, public officials, and people who work for public officials or government agencies. Get to know blogs relevant to your campaign. Contact the editor(s) to see if you can post a guest blog or become a regular contributor. Reach out to contributors who seem to attract a lot of readers and commenters. Add your own comments to relevant posts.

## Advertise Online

Many public education and advocacy campaigns don’t have big advertising budgets with the ability to buy ads in big newspapers or on local television and radio. But you might be able to afford targeted online advertising strategies. It is possible to target online advertising in an extremely focused way to people who are searching for information about your issue, to websites that attract members of your target audience, or even directly to the personal pages of people on social networks such as Facebook.

One of the simplest forms of advertising is Google’s Adwords. This program allows you to have a sponsored link appear when someone searches for topics related to your campaign. The cost of the ad will vary, and Google gives you a lot of flexibility in limiting your overall spending. You can also target ads to users of Google’s email system. Google also has a grant program that provides free online advertising for qualified 501(c)(3) organizations. Find out more at <http://www.google.com/nonprofits/grantstutorial.html>.

## New Possibilities

The constantly changing world of new media offers new ways to educate and energize activists, identify and recruit new supporters, create visibility for your campaign, and potentially reach huge audiences at little cost. In addition, the interactive nature of

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blogs and social networks can help you benefit from the ideas and enthusiasm of supporters who take their own responsibility for spreading your message. And that can help you create a longer and stronger connection with individuals and a more powerful personal commitment to your campaign.

If new media is a new world for you, try not to be intimidated. Find colleagues or volunteers who live and breathe this world and tap into their expertise. Look for opportunities to recruit student interns who have grown up in the online world. And take advantage of online websites and discussion boards that can help you understand how to make new media work for you. The following resources can get you started.

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## thinking outside the box:

In February 2010, the political magazine “Campaigns & Elections” described a creative and effective use of online advertising to support an organizing campaign. A group of immigration reform advocates wanted to challenge CNN about the strident anti-immigrant rhetoric of one of its hosts, Lou Dobbs. The advocates created a hard-hitting ad and sought to buy time for it on CNN, fully expecting that the network would reject the ad. After publicizing the rejection, they worked to create more buzz by running a set of provocative ads on Facebook targeted specifically to employees at CNN and other news outlets. To CNN employees, it felt like a huge buy, but it cost a tiny fraction of what it would have cost to place an ad on the network. The campaign strategists also ran the Facebook ads targeting progressives and Latinos with a fundraising ask, and the ads quickly paid for themselves. With some data in hand about which ads were more effective, they bought banner ads on political blogs followed by reporters. The coverage they received soon made their campaign the top result for people who searched Google for the phrase “Lou Dobbs.” The campaign culminated in Dobbs’ resignation.

## New Media Resources

- The New Organizing Institute runs a progressive advocacy and campaign training program focused on cutting-edge online organizing techniques (e.g. writing effective emails, engaging bloggers, leveraging social networks, utilizing video), political technology (e.g. using data effectively, progressive technology infrastructure), and the intersection with field and management of these areas of new organizing. You can read its Encyclopedia of New Organizing, watch previously recorded webinars online, and sign up for activist gatherings and trainings such as its Rootscamp, an interactive “unconference” where participants create the agenda and share their own successful stories and strategies:  
<http://www.neworganizing.com>
- The Case Foundation’s “Gear up for Giving” project includes links to free tutorials about social media strategy, blogging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and more:  
<http://www.casefoundation.org/social-media-tutorials>
- The article “Dissecting the craft of online political advocacy” can be found at:  
<http://www.epolitics.com>
- K Street Café is a blog where experts from a variety of backgrounds share new and novel ways technology, the Internet and social media are being used to shape public policies:  
<http://www.kstreetcafe.com>
- Frogloop is a blog about social networking and online organizing for nonprofit organizations sponsored by Care2. It also has tips about using social networks and tracking their effectiveness:  
<http://www.frogloop.com/>
- Companies such as Democracy in Action offer a package of tools for managing building an email list, creating advocacy alerts & petitions, and collecting donations:  
<http://salsalabs.com/democracyinaction>
- Network for Good also has some free tools for online fundraising:  
<http://www1.networkforgood.org/>
- Google for Nonprofits is also a good resource for online tools:  
<http://www.google.com/nonprofits/>
- EchoDitto is a new media firm that provides some free advice on best practices:  
<http://www.echoditto.com/best/organizing>
- Here’s an article about how one progressive religious campaign, Standing on the Side of Love, used social media in its campaigns to support LGBT equality and immigration reform:  
<http://krausnotes.com/2010/04/10/finding-faith-a-look-at-the-standing-on-the-side-of-love-campaign/>
- Epolitics has specific sections on the use of different social networks like Facebook and Myspace:  
<http://www.epolitics.com>
- Frogloop is a blog about social networking and online organizing for nonprofit organizations sponsored by Care2. It also has tips about using social networks and tracking their effectiveness:  
<http://www.frogloop.com/>
- M&R Strategic Services is a communications consulting firm that helps nonprofits use online tools. You can find a set of case studies and articles at:  
<http://www.mrss.com/publications.html>



