



Working with the Mainstream Media

NASCO Institute 2008

Facilitated by Michael Gregor

*Much of this material has been adapted
from a wide variety of other sources.*

THE SEVEN CS OF A GOOD MESSAGE

1. **Clear:** People need to be able to understand it the first time you say it.
2. **Concise:** It needs to be short and to the point.
3. **Compelling:** It needs to be about something your audience cares deeply about.
4. **Connected:** It needs to be focused on your audience and their needs/desires/likes/dislikes rather than your own. This is often the toughest lesson to learn and the point where many go wrong.
5. **Contrasting:** What makes you different or better than others?
6. **Credible:** Your audience needs to believe what you are saying. (Remember, not everything that is true is always credible).
7. **Constant:** Repeat it over and over and over...

WHERE IS THE REPORTER COMING FROM?

Keep in mind that reporters have a job to do, and their job is to get a good story. They are not your friends and they know little, if anything, about your issue. They are under deadlines and often have multiple stories going at once, and they are under constant pressure from their editors. The media are businesses with the ultimate goal of selling papers and increasing ratings, which place added constraints on reporters.

Don't let that intimidate you. You're not going to lose anything by trying. If you're not having any luck, be direct. Ask the reporter what it will take to get them to cover your story. They might tell you exactly what you need to do. And remember, reporters want to cover good stories, which are what you are providing.

DEVELOPING WRITTEN MATERIALS

The first thing a reporter is likely to ask when you call them to pitch a story is: "Do you have anything in writing?" Help make their job as easy as possible by developing brief, easy-to-read materials. Especially important is a 1-2 page media advisory or press release with details of an event or news story. The style and content should resemble a simple newspaper story, with strong headlines, facts and quotes. When possible, other background materials can be helpful, including fact sheets, spokespeople bios or report summaries.

DEVELOPING A TARGETED MEDIA LIST

It is important to think about which reporters will be interested in your story. Are they reporters who cover health? Politics? Housing? Entertainment? Is it a local or a national story? Is it a story that's good for newspaper, radio and/or television? From there, develop a list of reporters' names and numbers to call. Describe in more detail why you are calling and how you can get them more information. Practice leaving messages on your own answering machine. Don't forget to leave your phone number if you leave a message.

UNDERSTANDING HOW NEWS IS CREATED

Identifying the newsworthiness of an issue is not as difficult as it may sound. The old tenets of news such as the rich and famous, the bizarre, pets and children are still as relevant as ever. The crucial point of generating news that is relevant to your organization is the ability to translate an issue into a story of relevance and interest to the majority of the population and thus gaining coverage for it.

Once you understand what is of interest to the wider community, the everyday America, together with a knowledge of journalism and what motivates journalists, you will be immensely better equipped to prepare effective media plans and strategies.

Traditionally, there are seven news categories:

1. The rich and famous
2. Accidents and disasters
3. New discoveries, products and statistics
4. The heroic
5. Conflict
6. Children and animals
7. The oddball, outrageous and the bizarre

These obviously are broad categories, but by fine-tuning your communications to fit into one of these, you will assist the journalists in determining the news value of the story.

Within the everyday activities of organizations, the opportunity will arise to generate newsworthy stories. Added to this, organizations can augment their chances of gaining positive coverage for their issues by establishing processes and systems that will help identify publicity opportunities.

Positive media coverage may come from:

- Plans for new projects and services
- Progress on new projects
- Introduction of new technology
- Statistics and new records
- Changes in regulation
- Policing of regulations in the interest of public safety
- Safety standards
- Environmental damage (or potential for)
- Notable achievements by the organization or its staff
- New appointments, promotions, retirements
- Historical milestones for the organization
- Significant contributions by the organization to the community

News stories/interest can be generated by:

- Establishing an events or media opportunities register
- Writing media releases
- Being alert for photo opportunities
- Conducting a poll or survey and releasing the results
- Staging events to tie in and coincide with broader events
- Stage a demonstration
- Pass a resolution

SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Priscilla Ring or Josh Glasstetter at 202-467-4999

February 28, 2005

LEGISLATURE SENDS ANOTHER HARSH MESSAGE TO GAY MEN AND LESBIANS: "YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE"

Legislature gives preliminary OK to discriminatory anti-gay constitutional amendment

The Virginia legislature gave preliminary approval on Saturday, February 26 to a proposed state constitutional amendment that would not only restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples, but would also prohibit legal protections for same-sex couples and their families through civil unions or similar relationships.

"Virginia says it's for lovers, but that slogan should be retired as false advertising," said People For the American Way President Ralph G. Neas. "In a state whose legal code is already filled with laws discriminating against gay people, this proposed amendment would cement into the state constitution second-class citizenship for gay and lesbian Virginians."

Neas noted that this is not the first time the Virginia legislature has voted to mandate inequality. Years ago the state enacted a law prohibiting recognition of the marriages of same-sex couples and declaring such marriages void.

Last year's "Marriage Affirmation Act" prohibits partnership contracts for same-sex couples.

In order to be adopted, the proposed constitutional amendment must be passed by another session of the state legislature and then approved by a public referendum. (The approval of the governor is not required.) If the amendment passes during next year's legislative session, it could be on the statewide ballot as early as November 2006.

"A bipartisan majority of Americans support some form of legal protection for gay and lesbian Americans and their families," said Neas. "We hope Virginia legislators will reject this amendment the next time it comes before them, and will reconsider their assault on the basic American ideal of equality under the law for all people."

The proposed amendment passed the state Senate 30-10, and the House 80-17:

That only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this Commonwealth and its political subdivisions.

This Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance, or effects of marriage. Nor shall this Commonwealth or its political subdivisions create or recognize another union, partnership, or other legal status to which is assigned the rights, benefits, obligations, qualities, or effects of marriage.

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SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Laurie Boeder, 202-467-4999

November 17, 2004

PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY FOUNDATION TO PARTICIPATE IN OHIO VOTER HEARING

People For the American Way Foundation (PFAWF) will be among the groups gathering testimony on irregularities and inequities in the conduct of the November election at a hearing scheduled this Friday in Cleveland, Ohio. PFAWF is a founding member of Election Protection (EP), which deployed more than 25,000 volunteer poll watchers, lawyers and law students across the nation during the November election, along with a nationwide EP voter hotline that received more than 125,000 calls from voters. Nearly 2,000 EP volunteers were deployed across Ohio in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Akron, Toledo, and Youngstown.

PFAWF is analyzing the problems reported across the country and hoping to gather more evidence at the Ohio hearing to buttress a range of initiatives aimed at correcting those problems, including lawsuits and an agenda for election reform.

Ohio voters who experienced problems on Election Day and have not already notified EP are encouraged to attend the Cleveland hearing. Two similar hearings held last week in Columbus drew hundreds of citizens who testified about their personal experiences with voter suppression and election irregularities.

The coalition of organizations participating in the hearing includes the Ohio Conference NAACP, Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor, Voices of the Electorate, Black Women's Political Action Committee, Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition, NAACP National Voter Fund, Neighborhood Centers Association, Ohio Voterization Project, Ohio Voter Protection Coalition, CASE Ohio, and African American Women's Agenda Education Foundation.

What: Ohio Voter Hearing

Who: Vicky Beasley, PFAWF's legal director for EP Helen Forbes Fields, civil rights attorney and EP volunteer Greg Moore, executive director of the NAACP National Voter Fund Melvin S. Schwarzwald, co-chair of the Ohio Voter Protection Coalition legal operation Jasmine Torres Lugo, former judge, Cleveland Municipal Court

When: Friday, November 19th from 6 – 9 p.m.

Where: AFL-CIO Laborers Hall (lower level)
3250 Euclid Ave.
Cleveland, OH

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BOOKS

SPIN Works!

A Media Guidebook for the Rest of Us

By Robert Bray

Independent Media Institute (2000)

Making the News: A Guide for Activists and Nonprofits

By Jason Salzman

Basic Books (2003)

ONLINE RESOURCES

The Spin Project

www.spinproject.org

The Praxis Project

www.thepraxisproject.org/irc/media.html

Fenton Communications Best Practices

www.fenton.com/pages/5_resources/1_bestpractices.htm

Campus Climate Challenge Media Toolkit

www.climatechallenge.org/resources/wikibooks/media-toolkit

Effect Communications

www.effectcommunications.com



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Reporters are people too.

Developing Relationships with Reporters

One of the most effective things an activist can do to promote her views is to cultivate relationships with reporters. In his book, *Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists*, Jason Salzman quotes a reporter from a major daily whose sentiments are probably echoed by journalists everywhere: “A lot of what gets covered depends on personal relationships at the paper.” Can’t get more explicit than that.

Here are some tips for strengthening relationships with individual reporters, and expanding and prioritizing your media database:

News is a two-way street: Be a resource for reporters.

Reporters need you just as badly as you need them. You need them to cover your issue and carry your frame and message. They need the fresh information and real stories you can provide. Develop a reputation as someone who has accurate information, meets deadlines, can provide additional contacts and sources, and is always good for a clever quote or a much-needed fact.

Make sure reporters know they can trust you. Help them feel the information they need that you provide about your issue is accurate and up-to-date, that you are playing fairly and squarely with them.

Respect their professionalism. Even if their media outlet has a different opinion about your issue than you, all parties can engage in the process respectfully. Provide other contacts for the reporter, even from the other side if requested. Once or twice a year offer to “do lunch” and then brief the reporter on upcoming news.

Think like a reporter.

Reporters (and people in general) won’t listen to you just because you’re right; they pay attention when you’re relevant. Think in terms of what a reporter and her boss, the editor, would consider newsworthy. Everyone thinks their issue is the most important, compelling subject and should be covered all the time, but reporters are faced with hundreds of issues and stories. How is yours interesting? What sets it apart? What hooks

make your story particularly relevant right now?

Be accessible to reporters.

They will usually try to get you on one phone call. If they cannot find you they will often move on to other sources. Give reporters your direct line and a cell phone number—plus your home number if appropriate. Carry a pager or cellular phone, especially at media events where a reporter might be calling you to get the news as it is being made. One group scored extra television coverage simply because an editor, scrounging for news on a slow day, phoned an activist at a rally to get a quote. Before the activist hung up she had persuaded the editor to send a news crew to cover the event.

Always be prepared to say something about an issue when a reporter calls. A reporter never likes to hear, “I’ll get back to you later today.” They may not have ten minutes to spare or you might not get back to them on time. Clever, fast-thinking activists can spin off a soundbite at will. It takes practice, but you get good at it.

If you absolutely do not know the answer to a reporter's questions—especially technical or factual inquiries—say the following: “I don't know that information. I will find out and get back to you immediately. What is your deadline?” Then get back to the reporter on time. You may also offer one or two other expert sources for the reporter's rolodex. Provide additional contacts and sources, and is always good for a clever quote or a much-needed fact. Clever, fast-thinking activists can spin off a soundbite at will.

Know your facts.

Your reputation rides on the accuracy of the information you give reporters. Never give reporters inaccurate or even questionably accurate information. And if you are spreading rumors or gossip, let the reporter know and be prepared to back it up. The opposition will most likely attempt to distort and downright lie about the facts. At least be factual on your side.

Do not expect reporters to be your cheerleaders.

Decision makers at news outlets often oppose progressive stances because of their pro-business (and pro-advertising revenue) disposition. Even those reporters working for supportive media can't be viewed as a megaphone for your issue. The job of the news re-

porter is to be unbiased, or at a minimum fair and balanced. So, among other things, that means they should not be expected to reprint your press release verbatim, although some small-size media might.

Do not call reporters just to be quoted.

Sometimes you may be a major source for a reporter and still not be quoted. It is frustrating, but those are the breaks. If you feel the omission of you or your group substantially affects the story, call that to the reporter's attention. But remember, reporters are wary of sources who whine about not being quoted all the time. Be a resource even if it means you might not be in the story. Maybe next time you will.

Do not waste reporters' time.

In other words, don't be a schmooze hog. This is tacky and will tarnish your reputation. Only contact reporters when you have newsworthy information, a good pitch or are responding to an inquiry or a story. Some reporters keep a mental list of news pests and other obnoxious non-sources who aggravate them on a routine basis. Do not make that list.

Many reporters loathe the caller who says, “Hi, did you get my press release?” Reporters do not have time to call everyone back to say whether or not they received the release. If you call a reporter, go ahead and pitch your story. In the course of the pitch, you can remind him or her about the media release and offer to send another.

Do not exaggerate.

You can spin your news, but check the hyperbole. Be reasonable. Not every story pitch will be jaw-droppingly important. Reporters are primarily looking for the facts, additional contacts, or your quotes to convey a sense of importance or controversy. They do not want Oscar acceptance speeches, used car salesman “act now!” pitches, or screaming drama queens on the other end of the phone. Only contact reporters when you have newsworthy information, a good pitch or are responding to an inquiry or a story. Reporters are primarily looking for the facts, additional contacts, or your quotes to convey a sense of importance or controversy.

Everything is on the record.

Enough said. Even if you feel like you have a great relationship with a reporter, don't say anything you

wouldn't want to see on the front page or the evening news. If you talk with a reporter for an hour about responsible tax policy but utter one aside about how your organization is being investigated by the IRS, guess which part of the conversation is likely to make a headline?

Never say, "No comment."

Like it or not, your audience and journalists will take that as an admission of guilt. If you don't know the answer to something or don't feel comfortable answering a question, it's perfectly acceptable to respond with, "Can I get back to you on that?" But remember: if you promised more information, deliver it on time.

Don't take it personally if you get "bumped."

If you have the unfortunate luck of staging a living wage rally or photo-op right when some huge national story breaks, and your event is missed because all the media is covering the big story, those are the breaks.

Be a media consumer.

Many progressives dislike or ignore television and other important media outlets. If you want to reach the audience you've targeted, you have to know the media they use. Watch the news shows in your city, taking notes on the reporters. Read bylines and remember who covered what issue. Research your issue on Google News, Nexis, and websites of relevant publications.

A word about "exclusives."

Giving exclusives—the first and only shot at important news—can have both positive and negative repercussions. On the positive side, a well-placed exclusive to a key media outlet can result in a major, in-depth story that will spark other news coverage. Plus, you develop a stronger relationship with the reporter. On the negative side, be prepared to take the wrath of reporters who did not get the exclusive. Kiss their butts—in a professional manner, of course—and toss them something else in the future. Never give an exclusive to a reporter and then feed the story to another reporter. Both will be furious. If you get into a "bidding war" for a story, take the audience size of the media and your relationships with the reporters into consideration.

Checklist: tips for a perfect pitch

- Pitch your story
 - Don't call to confirm receipt of releases or advisories
 - Treat this as an initial sales call, not a follow-up
- Keep it brief
- Pitch to reporters with whom you have a relationship
 - This means first building the relationship!
- Have a back-up pitch – if they don't like your first idea, they might like your others
- Have multiple hooks
 - Provide more than one reason your story idea is interesting
- Ask questions and anticipate and answer questions
- Be knowledgeable about reporter's prior work
- Ask for referrals
 - If this reporter is not interested in the story, which of her colleagues might be?
- Visualize your story for TV and print photos
- Reporters are human beings too
 - Respect their schedule, deadlines, priorities, and humanness
- Personalize your story
 - Offer compelling spokespeople to tell the story
- Always be more reasonable than your opponent
- Pass the "brother in law" test
 - Would an outsider who is not in the activist world understand or sympathize with your story?
- Tell your story and control the message
 - If they ask you a question outside of your message, guide them back to the message
- Don't be a diva
- Don't exaggerate facts or the importance of your issue
- Avoid "sweeps week" in television
 - Check with your local stations to see when "sweeps", the ratings period, occurs. Avoid pitching TV reporters during sweeps so reporters can focus on the gory/bizarre stories that boost ratings during those weeks.
- Consider exclusives
- Know the media outlets your target audience consumes

Be Organized: Create a media list/database

- Purchase media directories such as the Yellow Pages, Bacon's, Burrelle's, or the New California Media Ethnic Media Directory
- Exchange media contact lists with your colleague organizations
- Capture information on reporters who contact your organization
- Remember alternative, independent, ethnic and community media
- Continually expand and update your database
- Prioritize the reporters who can help you advance toward your goals

Bonus points: If you really want to start a great relationship

Take a reporter to coffee/ a meal

Call or e-mail a reporter who writes about your issue and comment positively about a recent article.

Tour a newsroom or make other personal contact.

Go to City Hall, a local trial, or other places media are already gathering.

Capture essential information about reporters from other staff/ colleagues.



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The who, what, when where, and why of it all

News Releases

Other than the telephone, press releases and media advisories — often lumped together under the term “news releases”—are the basic methods of communicating your news to reporters.

The Reality

Reporters throw away or ignore many if not most press releases because they:

- Do not contain any news
- Do not have contact information or other key data to make the reporter's job easier
- Are filled with typos and other embarrassments, causing the reporter to doubt the integrity of the organization that sent the release
- Are confusing, poorly written, or worse—boring

Two Types of News Releases

“Media Advisory”

This is a short, one-page, concise piece advising the media of news to be made. Typically, a media advisory invites reporters to cover

some event or press conference or notifies them of your news. It usually contains the “who, what, where, when and why” of the news, including contact names, phone numbers, email and web addresses and other critical facts. The media advisory is sent out before an event or news is made.

“Press Release,”
 a.k.a. “Media Release”

This document is longer than a media advisory, but rarely more than two pages. A press release is typically written like a news story—containing quotes, “color” and background—and summarizes your news. It is written as if it were to appear in the morning newspaper—though, of course, that will not happen since most media will not run your release verbatim. The press release is often handed out at a news event or included in a press kit.

The key to successful news releases is brevity and factual accuracy. Get to the most important part of the news as soon as possible and make sure everything is accurate: facts, name spellings, dates and times. Some reporters

have said that if their attention is not piqued by the headline or the end of the lead paragraph, they rarely read any further.

Tips for Media Advisories and Press Releases

Starting at the top of the page, all news releases should contain:

- Your organization's logo. This should be at the very top of the paper.
- Either “For Immediate Release”—meaning the information can be used as soon as a reporter gets it; or “Embargoed Until [date]”—meaning the reporter cannot use the news until the date specified.
- The date the release is distributed.
- Contact name(s), email and web addresses and phone number(s), including cellular phones.
- A “boilerplate,” a 2-3 sentence description of your organization in clear, concise, jargon-free language.

Reporters’ desks are overflowing with news releases announcing some “big news” that really is not. Most of these are trying to sell some commercial product or event in the guise of news. Fortunately, your release, which will promote your cause, can and will distinguish itself from the others if you follow these basic tips.

The headline is key. Most reporters have about thirty seconds to scan a news release. They want the news to jump out at them. If you do not catch their attention in the headline, into the “circular file” the release goes.

Summarize your news into a headline. The headline can be up to four lines long, centered, in bold face and written all in capital letters, usually in a larger type size. You may do a stacked headline: a main, attention-grabbing head followed by a slightly smaller, more detailed head. The headline should capture the larger frame of the news, communicate a sense of drama, and pull reporters into the story.

After the headline, the first paragraph—“the lead”—is paramount. This is the summary paragraph that communicates the most important components and frames the issue for maximum media im-

pact. It must also capture attention. *Caution:* Do not try to explain everything in this paragraph.

Write the remainder of the press release in descending order of importance. In journalism, this is called the “inverted-pyramid” style of writing. The most important, base-laying news goes at the top, the lesser details below.

Frame your news—establish its importance and impact, and your position—by the end of the lead paragraph. At the latest, your news should be framed by the end of the second paragraph. By the third paragraph you should move your key messages.

Include one or two pithy soundbite quotes in the press release.

In media advisories, list the “Five W’s”—who, what, when, where and why—after the headline and lead framing paragraph.

WHO: Who is announcing the news? This will probably be your organization or coalition. But remember, the news is not the fact that your group is announcing something, but what is being announced. Therefore, the lead paragraph will first communicate the news, then indicate who made it. A brief list of key speakers may be included here, with their names and affiliations.

WHAT: What is being announced: a media event, rally, protest, press conference or release of a new report?

WHERE: The location of the event. Include the actual address or directions, unless it is an obvious place like the main steps of City Hall.

WHEN: The time—include am or pm—and date. Make certain the day and date correspond.

WHY: This is your key message. It is “why” you are making news.

Since your event will feature strong visuals, tip reporters off to the photo opportunities at the end of the media advisory. This is utterly essential for TV.

End both advisories and press releases with the marks ###, or -30-. This lets journalists know the release is over. If your release jumps to the next page, write “more” at the bottom and center it. At the

top left corner of the next page, write “Page 2” and provide a subject reference.

When to Send the Release

In general, you should mail (including email, for those reporters who prefer emails) the release ten days before the event, fax it five days before the event, and follow up with a phone call within three days of the event. Of these three methods, faxing (or emailing) and calling are paramount.

Remember: Do not call reporters to ask if they got your release. They do not have time to respond to every release they receive. Instead, call them to pitch the news and remind them about the release. Be prepared to send another if the first was misplaced.

News Release Taboos

- Do not include jargon or political rhetoric in your releases.
 - There should be no mission statements in releases.
 - Do not write in long sentences and ponderous paragraphs. One- or two-sentence paragraphs are fine.
 - Typos, factual inaccuracies and other mistakes kill the integrity of your organization and news.
-
- Keep it short.
 - Write a strong headline or stacked headline.
 - Write a tight and hard-hitting lead paragraph.
 - Move your messages!

Sample Press Release

Press releases are typically written like news stories. They summarize the news and event, contain quotes, “color” and background. A press release is written as if it were to appear in the morning newspaper, although most media will not run the release verbatim (some neighborhood or smaller press will, however). The press release is distributed at the news event, included in the press kit, and faxed or e-mailed to no-show reporters the day the news is made. Press releases should be no more than one or two pages long.

**ATLiving
Wage**

Atlanta Living Wage Coalition
1430 West Peachtree Street
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Phone (404) 555-1212
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PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed for:
Thursday, October 21, 2001

Contact: Cindia Cameron (404) 555-1213
Sandra Robinson (404) 555-1214

ATLANTA LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

Community Pushes for City To Join More Than 60 Other Locales with Living Wages for Employees of Companies Receiving Tax Dollars

Survey Shows Strong Political Support For Measure

ATLANTA... As low-income workers told their stories of toiling at two or more full-time jobs and still living in the hardship of poverty, community leaders from around Atlanta gathered to announce the kick-off of the Atlanta Living Wage campaign today. More than 60 community, labor and religious leaders plus scores of supporters participated in the event.

In addition, survey results from mayoral and city council candidates, released at the kick off, showed two-thirds have committed to supporting a living wage ordinance.

“A person working full time should earn enough to lift a family above poverty,” said Sandra Robertson, Director of Georgia Citizens on Hunger. “Companies that benefit from taxpayer dollars can and should pay a living wage.”

The living wage movement is a response to the rapid growth of low-wage service jobs, the declining value of the minimum wage and the spiraling costs of housing, healthcare and childcare. The living wage ordinance will require that the city and other employers receiving tax dollars pay workers a wage that lifts a family above the federal poverty level and provides health benefits.

Camille Johnson, a security guard at Hartsfield Airport, is one of the workers whose family would benefit from a living wage ordinance.

Camille has more than four years of experience in her job, yet she earns just \$7 an hour and receives no health benefits. Camille and her children currently live in a homeless shelter. Wages for security guards at the nation’s busiest airport are startlingly low. Meanwhile, Americans are demanding a shift in priorities in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and continued threats.

“The job I do stands between you and disaster,” said Johnson, “yet it doesn’t even pay enough to keep a roof over my family’s head or provide a safe place for my children to stay while I’m working.”

More than one-in-four hourly wage jobs in Georgia pay \$7 an hour or less, and metro Atlanta accounts for 65 percent of all jobs in the state, indicated Charlie Flemming, President of the Atlanta Central Labor Council. “Wages that low put even a modest standard of living beyond the reach of large numbers of working families.”

(more)

Write all releases on organization letter-head with the address and phone number.

Write “Press Release” or “Media Release” in large letters to draw attention.

Indicate whom to contact for information.

Indicate the date the information can be released, or the date the news happens. If embargoed (restricted for release), indicate when reporters can go with the information.

Use larger font for the headline than for the text. Make sure the headline includes the essential information about the release.

“Stack” headlines to draw more attention and spotlight the main news and hooks.

Lead paragraph should catch attention, frame and summarize. Include your “hooks” at the beginning.

Communicate your key message—here it’s “people who work should not be poor”—near top of the release. Can be a quote or paraphrase.

Use short paragraphs in body. Write in “inverted pyramid” style with most important information at the top narrowing down to the least important information at the end.

Include sound bite quotes from key spokespersons, especially those affected.

Type “more” if it jumps to a second page.

According to preliminary figures from the Georgia Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Project, a family of three would need at least \$13 an hour to cover a minimum-needs budget. A single working adult would need at least \$9.50 an hour.

In addition, the Department of Housing and Urban Development considers a housing budget to be 30 percent of a worker's total income. By that measure a worker earning \$7 an hour could afford to spend no more than \$336 a month on rent. In Atlanta, fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment is \$590 per month.

"We need a living wage ordinance in Atlanta so that workers like me can provide safety and security to our families and the public," said Hartsfield Airport worker Camille Johnson. "Our jobs are valuable to the community, and so is our need for time with family and volunteer activities. Working one job with a living wage instead of several poverty wage jobs would make all this possible."

Supporters of the living wage pointed to ordinances in other cities similar to the Atlanta measure. Research of those ordinances indicated:

- Costs to employers were modest. For the majority, the living wage increases were less than one percent of operating budgets.
- Costs to taxpayers were negligible. In Baltimore, cost has been about 17 cents per person annually. The real costs of the city contracts actually decreased the year after the law went into effect.
- Job creation did not suffer. Baltimore contractors, for example, who held contracts both before and after the living wage ordinance was passed reported no lay-offs.

The Living Wage Campaign was founded by 9 to 5, Atlanta Working Women, Atlanta Central Labor Council (AFL-CIO), Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger and Project South in April 2001. More than 60 community, religious and labor organizations have so far endorsed the campaign

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List facts in concise and easy-to-grasp format. You don't need to list every fact, just the key ones that reinforce your frame and message. Consider one or two well-placed facts to head off opposition's arguments before they even happen.

Type ### to indicate the end of the release.

Sample Media Advisory

A media advisory is written in simple form without many details. Primarily, it contains the who, what, where, when and why of an event. The “why,” of course, is your key message. The advisory alerts journalists to an upcoming event without giving away all the substance. Media advisories should be no longer than a page in length. Fax or email 3-5 days in advance, or at least the day before. Follow it up with a phone call to the targeted reporter the day before the event to ensure they are coming.

**Our Town
Living Wage Coalition**

P.O. Box 1234
Our Town, USA 01234
Phone (333) 555-1212
Fax (333) 555-1213
info@ourtownlivingwage.org

MEDIA ADVISORY

For immediate release: October 21, 2001

Contact: Jane Smith
Office: (333) 555-1212
Cell: (333) 555-1234

LIVING WAGE RALLY AT CITY HALL TO FEATURE WORKERS TRYING TO MAKE ENDS MEET AND RISE ABOVE POVERTY

Our Town City Council Will Vote on Living Wage Ordinance That Day

Supporters of an Our Town living wage ordinance will rally at City Hall as the Mayor and City Council vote on the measure – the first of its kind in the state. Living wage laws raise the earnings of certain workers above the poverty line. Without a living wage, some workers must toil at two or three full-time jobs just to make ends meet.

WHAT: A rally on the steps of City Hall to coincide with the scheduled vote on the Our Town living wage law. This vote culminates months of intense political debate between workers and those opposing the ordinance. The public hearing at City Hall that day, and the rally, will highlight testimony from low-wage workers, social service advocates, clergy and an economist.

WHEN: 10:30 am – 12 noon, Saturday, June 17th, 2000.

WHERE: Our Town City Hall, 301 First Street

WHO: Workers to be affected by the vote, leaders and members of local religious congregations, unions, community groups, representatives of the living wage campaign.

WHY: “Our Town is ready to make history by passing a living wage ordinance,” said the Rev. Robert Smith, pastor of Our Town Episcopal Church. “With a living wage, the workers serving Our Town will earn enough to raise a family out of poverty. Everybody who works should not live in poverty.”

VISUALS: Banners, signs, giant “Living Wage Paycheck” made payable to “Working Families of Our Town.”

###

Write “Media Advisory” in large letters to draw attention.

Important: Indicate who to contact for more information. Include cell phone if possible in case reporters have to reach someone at the event.

Don’t forget the date. If the advisory contains news that is embargoed (such as findings of report to be released later), indicate that. Otherwise, write “For Immediate Release.”

Write all advisories on organizational letterhead with the address and phone number.

Headlines get larger type fonts than text. Make them stand out and grab attention. Sometimes reporters don’t get past the headline and first paragraph!

Subhead (or “stacked” head) further frames the news and provides hooks.

Lead paragraph should catch attention, frame and summarize event. Include as many hooks as possible (controversy, timeliness, first-ever, human interest, etc.).

Include only the “Five W’s:” who, what, where, when and why. Don’t try to explain everything in your release, let them come to the event to get it. Include enough information to interest reporters. Include a list of speakers, if confirmed.

Make sure the day and date match, and the time is am or pm.

Include a photo-op to lure cameras.

Type “###” to indicate end of the advisory.

THE SPIN PROJECT

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Projecting your voice over the airwaves

Broadcast Media and Spokesperson Skills

There's no denying that the rise of online communications has had a huge impact on how Americans get their news—according to the Pew Center for the People and the Press' 2006 survey of news habits, nearly one in three people regularly get their news online. But the dot-coms aren't king. The same research shows that the growth of online news audiences have slowed considerably since 2000. People are turning to online news as a supplemental source to traditional media and use it more for speed and convenience, not for in-depth reporting. While nearly half of all Americans spend at least 30 minutes getting news on television, just 9% spend that long getting news online. Broadcast media (television and radio) is still the news source that most people turn to for more comprehensive coverage about what's happening in their local communities, the nation and the world at large.

Pew's 2006 survey found that 34% of respondents got their news from the cable news networks, 36% said radio and a whopping 54% said they got their news from local television. For reaching the biggest number of people in the shortest amount of time, you can't beat broadcast media.

Knowing the Newsroom

While many of the same rules that apply to pitching print and online outlets apply to broadcast, each of these media sources have their own special set of needs and structures that you'll want to understand. Knowing who to call and where to go in the newsroom is important information for identifying reporters who might cover your story and for responding to media coverage. If you haven't yet, take a look at our [Developing Relationships with Reporters tutorial](#) to learn more about how to develop relationships with broadcast reporters and how a newsroom works.

Knowing your Audience

Being an effective spokesperson is all about preparation and practice. Preparation involves a few different elements, and, as we discuss further in our [Strategic Communications Planning tutorial](#), knowing who you want to reach and identifying your audience are key to being an effective spokesperson.

So, when in doubt: research. Before going on air, be sure to ask the producer questions about who their show reaches, what the demographics are, where the show is aired and at what time of day and any other questions that will help you get a better understanding of who you will be addressing. Watch or listen to the show beforehand-get a sense of the hosts' style and know what the format of the show is (is it live, call-in, a one-on-one interview?). If you'll be on with other folks, find out who they are.

While we're offering general practices and tips, context is important. How one interviews or speaks in front of a rally, on local news, national news, progressive or alternative media, community media, ethnic media or a long-form radio shows vs. short interview radio shows will impact the choices you make as a spokesperson. Inevitably, you'll become a smarter, more sophisticated and more seasoned spokesperson.

The more you know ahead of time, the more effective you'll be in reaching and changing the hearts and minds of that audience.

Practice, Practice, Practice

We can't emphasize enough that practice is the key to becoming an effective spokesperson. Great spokespeople aren't born-they're truly made.

Learning how to use an interview as a platform to reach a larger audience with your message-and to not just simply respond to the interviewer's questions-is a skill that takes time to develop. With practice comes confidence, and with confidence comes great interviews.

Image Isn't Everything, but It's a Lot

How you look on camera is an important part of how your audience will perceive you and your message. When it comes down to it:

- 60% of what an audience perceives is visual.
- 30% is auditory, or what people hear.
- 10% is what an audience perceives is the message.

When we break this down more, what we understand is that how one looks on camera-meaning how you use your hands, how you sit or stand, your choice of clothing, how you do your hair- impacts how people respond to you as a spokesperson.

Messaging

Framing and messaging are helpful tools for creating powerful soundbites. The SPIN Project believes that an effective message includes a statement of the Problem, a vision of the better world (Solution), and something your audience can do to help you bring about a solution (Action). To create an effective message, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the problem your organization or campaign is trying to solve?
- How do you propose to solve the problem? Make sure to include your description of what your community will look like after the problem has been solved and include the values your organization shares with your audience.
- What is the specific, concrete action you are asking your audience to take to help you solve the problem you have identified?

Who Are your Spokespeople?

Spokespersons aren't just your messengers. In many cases the spokesperson is just as important as the issue. It is important not only to learn how to be a better spokesperson, but to develop the skills of a wide and diverse array of your community members to have many messengers with a unified message to push forward your goal. Reporters often do not have time to call a lot of different people to find out more information or quotes for their stories.

Don't just identify your key spokespersons, make sure that they are directly available to reporters.

Many Messengers, Unified Message

Developing the skills of a wide range of spokespeople will only strengthen the work that you do, as well as your opportunities to reach a number of target audiences. Think about who you want to have speak, who they represent, who they will reach and how it will fit into your larger strategy. Who your spokespersons are might also depend on what type of organization you are-meaning, if you're a membership organization, it's important to empower members to be key spokespeople in the media. Think also about who is contributing a wide breadth of voices that are speaking to your issue. Have a diversity of spokespeople, including women, people of color, LGBT people, people of faith and immigrants. You'll want to be sure to have organizational figureheads, including board members, executive directors, members (if applicable) and key program staff, along with community members, religious leaders, political leaders and community leaders. If you have support from local businesses, ask them to speak on your behalf, especially if it's an "unlikely ally," or voice that is not often heard speaking out about your issue. Be creative! Multiple messengers from many walks of life, all echoing the same unified message, will help foster a wider base of support.

Tips for Television

As with all interviews, context matters. We offer some general guidelines, but some circumstances might call for a different practice. Work from what you know and who you are trying to reach. Before the show begins, think about your audience, the format of the show, how long you'll get to speak and your key messages. With most TV opportunities, you'll have a short amount of air time, so be prepared with a key message that you can repeat comfortably and with confidence.

When interviewing on TV, image and body language are just as important as what you say

Becoming a Powerful Spokesperson

Project confidence. Projecting confidence is key to winning over an audience. Being nervous while speaking to the public is normal, and many say it's positive to feel that way before you speak. But showing it is another thing-that's why it's important to project confidence (even if you're not feeling it). People believe in those who are perceived as confident, who know the issue and can show how they are personally connected or affected by it, able to reach people's hearts and minds. Remember to stand tall, or if sitting, sit forward in your chair. Commanding a strong presence assures your audience that you are a credible spokesperson and shows that you believe in yourself and your expertise, that what you have to say deserves and needs to be heard.

Keep it short. You don't need to explain everything to be heard. Rather, it's better to keep it brief. Think about what you want to say beforehand, create short soundbites (eight seconds in length) that capture your main points and your key message about the issue or campaign. And practice, practice, practice.

Personalize your message. Add something personal at the beginning of your soundbite to create more of a human connection between you and your audience. Some examples are: "As a working mother..." or "As a first-generation immigrant..."-be sure that this is a genuine connection that people will resonate with your audience.

It's OK to say that you don't know. If you don't know the answer, it's OK to say so. Remember nothing is "off the record," but it's better to be honest about what you don't know than to say "no comment." Keep it slow and steady. Remind yourself to speak slowly. It is OK to pause and take a deep breath. Practice annunciating, and even over- annunciating, each syllable so that your words will be clearly articulated. If you catch yourself speaking too quickly, it's OK to pause, take a breath and start again. Remember, slow and steady.

Keeping it slow also helps keep you steady under more aggressive or difficult interview questions. It's always better to look more reasonable than your "opponents" or a somewhat hostile interviewer. Calm, cool and collected is the way to go.

The goal is to learn how to do this while also being confident and strong in your message, from beginning to the end. Even if you're on long-form radio shows, it's important from the very beginning that you respond with your message, not simply answer the question.

Practice, practice, practice!

Television Tips

- Clothing matters: Dress for your audience. Wear neutral colors that don't distract (NOT black or white).
- Avoid patterns, florals, stripes or dots and no big jewelry, buttons or slogans.
- Wear make-up.
- Smile!
- Use natural hand gestures that don't distract. Don't address the reporter personally.
- Don't be distracted by reporter or crew. Every blink, twitch and "uh," is magnified.
- Always respond with key messages/soundbites: If you make a mistake, stop and start over.
- It's not a conversation, but use a conversational tone with a personal inflection.
- Remember that the audience is the target, not the interviewer.
- Always be more reasonable than your opponent!

in setting the tone. If you're at a rally or press conference, make sure that you are positioned so that the cameras pick up the visual posters and banners behind you, strengthening your message. How you might use your hands at a rally is different than when you're interviewing in a studio. You'll want to move your hands for emphasis, but not be overly dramatic, distracting people from hearing your message.

Be sure to look at the reporter, not the camera. Stay poised not only in your stance, but also your eye contact to demonstrate your confidence and comfort with the issue.

Always remember: Don't answer the question, respond with your message. Interview segments are often only 8-15 second soundbites. Don't get thrown by the reporter and get caught answering a bad question. Remind yourself that your audience is never the reporter, it's the people on the other side of the camera, and this is your chance to speak to them. Repeat your message, and you control the interview.

When ending the interview, thank the reporter, and wait until the camera is turned off before saying more to the reporter or offering further background information.

Radio Rules

While many of the tips for TV also apply to radio, without a visual component, it's your voice that "sets the stage." Ask yourself many of the same questions you would for TV, particularly in terms of preparation, research, listening to the show ahead of time, greeting hosts warmly and thanking them at the end. Practice on tape-record yourself so you can learn your strengths and areas you need to improve before the interview.

Radio often allows more time for you to talk about your issue and deliver your message. You could be on air for as long as 60 minutes, so be prepared with your soundbites, but also be ready to share stories that convey the points that you are trying to make. If you're on a longer show, remember that radio audiences change every 10-15 minutes, so repeat your messages often.

The host will often repeat who you are and who you represent, but don't rely on them to do so. Be sure to mention your organization's full name and a way for people to be in touch (preferably a Web site they can visit) at the beginning and end of the program.

When using statistics to help convey the larger impact of the story you are sharing, translate the numbers. For example, say "one-third" instead of "33.3 percent."

If there are opportunities for people to call in, organize your supporters to do so. It's a boost to you and the messages you are trying to convey to have friendly people call in to ask supportive questions, driving your message even further. Be sure to ask for an air-check, or if the show will be archived, so you can keep a copy for your news clips. Also, listen to the show afterwards so that you can use it as a learning tool, as well as a way to celebrate your successes!

Radio Rules

- Respond with key messages/soundbites.
- Do your phone interviews from a quiet office.
- Don't use a cordless or cell phone-use a landline and disable call waiting.
- Don't listen to the show while you are being interviewed.
- Speak slowly and with extra emphasis.
- Clarity, intensity and emotion make good radio.
- Smile-it still comes through on the radio.



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Considerations at the Intersection

Community Organizing and Strategic Communications

In our work with hundreds of community groups across the country, we at the SPIN Project have begun to observe a common set of questions emerging for organizers embarking on and evaluating communications efforts. These are vital strategic questions with serious political implications, and the goal of this piece is to identify these strategic choices so they are made consciously and deliberately. Communications is often a vehicle for surfacing some of the toughest choices in organizing campaigns, and we hope to lay out those considerations here to enable front-end deliberation and planning.

At the SPIN Project, our goal is to assist community organizing groups in using all the tools available to help get to the win. We believe that communications can help you achieve concrete changes that improve people's lives. We believe the time is now for grassroots groups to boldly engage the press to communicate our values and frame our issues. Strategic, aggressive,

planned and proactive public relations can make a difference in reframing debate and achieving our political, social and cultural goals.

We believe that a well designed, gracefully executed communications effort can till the soil to create ideal conditions for organizing success. Strategic communications can plant ideas in the minds of constituents and potential allies. If the issue has been covered well in the paper or the 6 o'clock news, organizers are much more likely to find success at the door. The reverse also holds true, ideally resulting in a complimentary relationship between communications and traditional organizing. Communications can also shape the organizing environment by altering the political dialog among decision-makers. If a journalist comes knocking on your target's door with specific questions about the issue, it can shape the context and terms of the debate.

In our experience, the following questions regularly arise for longtime community organizers beginning to utilize communications tools to support their organizing goals. This list is by no means exhaustive and we invite feedback to help us better address these considerations.

Please send feedback to info@spinproject.org.

And/Or

Are communications and organizing separate tasks? Can a communications strategy ever exist without an organizing strategy, and vice-versa?

In the twenty-first century, communications and organizing are inextricably intertwined. Organizers have known for a long time that one of their main tasks is to engineer strategic choices about who says what to whom and when. Communicators face essentially the same task. In a way, the main difference between communicators and organizers lies in the tools they use. Organizers specialize in one-on-one interactions, while communicators tend to focus on one-to-many interactions. While communicators can create economies of scale as they move the message toward mass audiences, nothing can replace the quality of the interaction created by the organizer. Organizers can address the hunger for community and belonging – which is in part created by what people see and hear in the media, and the sheer volume of information coming at them in the digital age. A good offensive needs to employ both methods – high volume communications to shape the campaign environment and high touch interactions to help develop deep personal commitments to our issues.

Strategy Development

Or, Which comes first, the organizing plan or the communication strategy?

Many community organizers are concerned that communications will hijack their organizing. They fear that appealing to mainstream media will necessarily water down their messages. They worry that integrating communications into their goals will lead to a campaign aimed at the media rather than the people. It doesn't have to be that way. In a well-thought-out community organizing process, both

communications and organizing must always serve your basic strategic goals.

The organizing should drive the strategy, but communications should always have a place at the planning and decision-making table to help guide the strategic choices of the effort. True, messages may differ according to audience. It's often not effective to talk to the news media the same way you talk to your base, and vice-versa. This is just another case of knowing what to say to whom, and when. When designing strategy, the practice of communications brings organizers some distinct advantages. First, communications can sometimes drive much speedier change than traditional organizing. We're not suggesting that everyone rely on communications as the "magic bullet" of social change, but there are times where a well-placed Op Ed or TV evening news story can affect your target more quickly than a community mobilization. But of course these speedy strikes must be driven by the broader strategy and rooted in your organizing goals.

The second advantage of communications is that it can help organizers sharpen their abilities to preach beyond the choir. In base-driven organizing we focus on what's good for us and our community – and we primarily speak to our community. The practice of strategic communications demands that we communicate to decision-makers or the people who influence them—and these are often people outside our base. Communication can broaden our outlook, break us out of that base-focused point of view and force us to link our issues to other constituencies and communities. Mainstream communications is a tool to link the interests of the base to the interests of those beyond the base.

Campaign Messengers

Communicators and organizers constantly wrestle with the question, Who is the face and voice of the campaign? For communicators, this question becomes, Who should be the spokesperson?

Many organizers fear that a PR-based approach to social action will result in prominent roles for spokespersons who do not represent the base or, if they are from the base, who speak in a way that is not authentic to the base. In a good communications effort, spokespersons are selected from the base and from

other strategic populations. They may not all always speak the language of the base (though they often will), but they always serve its interests.

These are tough questions for many campaigns. But we know that the difficult questions are often the most worthwhile – and we think one of the most difficult and worthwhile questions in organizing is “What are the best strategies to identify and select spokespeople in a way that both builds leadership and moves the issue politically?”

Generally, we recommend that you at least train spokespeople from each of the following categories – though there may be other important voices for your campaign:

Organizational leadership – You need someone who can be the official voice of the organization. Sometimes that’s the Executive Director or the board chair. No matter who takes the role, you need to have someone who is authorized to speak for the organization.

Your base – Sometimes it’s disastrous to have a talking head Executive Director on camera; an impassioned unpaid activist speaking from their own experience with the issue has far more potential to make for a compelling interview. In fact, some organizations have a policy that staff members never speak on the record to the press, and save that job for members. Training your base in spokesperson skills enhances their understanding of the strategy, develops their leadership skills and ultimately builds power for those who often do not have it.

Allies – Spokespeople need not be campaign leaders or even members of the organization. In fact, it’s often better if they come from outside the organization. Think creatively about the voices who ring true with your targets, and who can bring a new angle to the issue. Sometimes you need to borrow credibility from your friends in the early stages of the campaign. Identify and leverage the trusted sources in your community – doctors, small business leaders, seniors and others who can open your issue up to new audiences.

The Base and Beyond

How do you balance the messages that work with the base and the messages that will move audiences beyond our base?

A central tenet of communications is, “tailor your message to your target audience.” A central tenet of organizing is, “speak to people where they’re at.” These are essentially same principle, yet the divide over messaging can become one of the toughest questions in campaign planning. Out of respect for the base, organizers often want to use only messages that resonate with them. Yes, it is vital that we remain true to the analysis and voice of our constituents. But base driven messaging can sometimes result in messages that only work with the base, and the truth is that the people with the power to grant our demands will often be put off –and certainly not moved to action – by the messages that resonate with the base.

As we craft messages that are driven by the analysis and voice of the base, it is vital that we constantly evaluate our work from the perspective of the target and the broader audiences we are trying to move to action. So the planning question must evolve from “What do we want to say?” to “How can we say what we have to say in a way that people can hear?” Ultimately, we believe that the way to respect one’s base is to build power and win real and concrete change – and we believe that messages that work at the base and beyond are one of the most powerful tools organizers have to help achieve those wins.

Capacity

How do we successfully implement communications given our limited capacity and the demands on our resources? How much capacity is required to effectively communicate beyond the base? And why invest those resources in communications instead of putting them into base organizing?

If your organization doesn’t focus significant resources on communications, you may be missing out on an important strategic opportunity. Hiring communications talent can make the organizer’s job easier (by planting ideas on the ground and helping to shape the public opinion context for the work) and therefore help the organization to be more effective.

At the SPIN Project, we recommend that organizations invest in a communications staff position, money for communications materials, media databases and

other communications expenses. If you think you don't have the resources to do this, then consider converting an existing staff position to a communications position. Or use some of your resources to write a communications-specific grant. Contact your funders to see if they fund communications. Be creative about how you include communications in program funding requests. Many foundations expect communications to be written into your budget, and some even use it as an evaluation criteria for proposals. In fact, we overheard one foundation officer suggest that if a program did not devote 30% of its resources to communications, that it was not a viable change strategy in the media age.

The critical question is this: Would you make more progress if you had the communications capacity to support the organizing work? Ultimately, we don't believe that this is an either/or investment – rather that investing in communications makes the organizing more effective, as it builds power and credibility for the organization and its work.

Reframing Your Issue and Base

How much of our political and organizational capital should we devote to shape the way the media talks about our base and issue?

Part of an organizer's work is to reshape people's very identities: to help them rethink their relationship to power in society and to help them redefine their voice and their role in their communities. And of course we know that what our constituents see and hear in the media also plays a huge role in the construction of identity. We tell one story, but the news tells our communities something very different about themselves and the issues they face.

Modern organizers can and must employ communications to elevate the status of their base and the understanding of their issue in the media. Part of the vital work of building power for those who do not have it is to redefine the way these issues and constituencies are covered in the press. If community advocates aren't vigilant in addressing how the media frames race and poverty, who will be?

That said, reframing is an enormous undertaking and no organization will accomplish it alone. It should, however, be an ongoing task on which community

organizers cooperate across issues and then integrate into all communications work. This is a case where slow but deliberate progress is utterly necessary.

Race and Class

Which do you lead with?

The media climate has been largely hostile to low-income and people of color communities. Organizers must find ways to lead with a racial justice message that includes a role for allies and progressives who can speak to policies that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, because ultimately racial justice is necessary if we are to achieve economic equality in America. And vice versa. It's a case of both/and – because if economic justice is your primary goal, it's not going to happen with people of color suffering from disproportionate levels of poverty, hunger and unemployment.

Of course this is a question that ties directly to messaging. Your base may have a very clear racial analysis on the issue, but your target may or may not be ready to hear that analysis. Here are some sad but true facts about Americans' views on race, with thanks to Frank Gilliam at the UCLA Center for Communications and Community:

- ▶ Race and discrimination are viewed as old debates that have been solved; it is neither legal nor acceptable to discriminate based on race.
- ▶ When skin color does matter, it is more likely to be seen as providing an advantage to minorities, i.e. preferences in hiring or college admission, federal dollars to minority schools, contracting set-asides.
- ▶ If there are disparities between blacks and whites, it is not due to skin color. Instead it is viewed as being related to poverty, family, community, or values.

If that's where folks are, that may be where we have to start. Organizers reading this article want to speak the truth lived every day by their constituents, want to speak from the heart of their own experience, want to share their analysis of society. And we want to win. Over the long haul it may mean that we have to balance and alternate between those competing desires, while purposefully opening up a space to discuss how

institutionalized racism harms all of us, and the ways in which everyone benefits from a more equitable society.

Legitimacy

How will we maintain legitimacy in the eyes of our base when working with mainstream media? Shouldn't we focus on the ethnic and community media that our base uses and trusts?

The answer — as it often is — is both/and. Speak to your base via outlets they consider legitimate. Address your other targets via the media they trust, often mainstream or trade media.

Our communities cannot afford to be further marginalized — we have a responsibility to keep the issues important to our communities in front of the mainstream media. Involve your base in media work and remember that ultimately a strategic media hit will only serve to further legitimize your work to your base and the broader community.

Coalitions

How can a coalition communicate in a unified way? Will more moderate coalition allies water down our message? Are coalitions just superficial alliances to build power, or can they build deeper political partnerships as well?

As all organizers know, coalitions are essential to real change, but their politics can be tricky. This dilemma extends to communications. Many organizers are wary that communicating with a coalition will necessarily weaken their message. This does not have to be the case.

There are many available strategies in coalition communications. Certainly one is to develop a unified, common-ground message agreed upon by everyone in the coalition. But let's face it, messages created by everyone often please no one.

Another strategy might be for different members of a coalition to communicate a similar core message, but in ways that feel authentic to them. Often it is useful for a coalition to contain member organizations that politically align far to the left, because those less moderate groups can freely voice concerns that more moderate groups may not be able to speak to. If eve-

ryone has a role to play in a coalition and they can play that role comfortably and authentically, the coalition can lead to deeper alliances.

Conclusion

We hope these questions will spark a conversation in your organizations and coalitions, and we hope our suggestions will help you wrestle with the creative tensions inherent in social change work. And most of all, we hope that as organizers, you come to view strategic communications as a complement to, and a vital part of, your work. We look forward to continuing this discussion with you, and to serving as a resource for you in your work.

A shorter version of this article originally appeared in the Summer 2005 issue of Social Policy, a publication of The American Institute for Social Justice and the ACORN Institute.