



# CONNECTED TO THE ISSUES

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## Spring 2015

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### ACS Recent Appearances

Scarlett, Cassie, Heather and Lori have been pounding the marble hallways of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, lobbying on behalf of several ACS clients during the 2015 legislative session. So far, our team has logged more than 40 meetings with key leaders in the House and Senate, as well as key members of education and finance committees in both chambers.

On April 7, 2015, in partnership with the United States Department of Education and the [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](http://www.naeyc.org) ([www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)), Lori and Scarlett presented a webinar for [US Department of Education Early Learning's](http://www.ed.gov/early-learning) ([www.ed.gov/early-learning](http://www.ed.gov/early-learning)) [Preschool Development Grant](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html) ([www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/preschooldevelopmentgrants/index.html)) and [Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html) ([www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-earlylearningchallenge/index.html)) grantees entitled *Building Public Will as You Race to the Top*. The session will cover how to define public will, how to build it, and how to leverage existing public-private partnerships and relationships. It will provide grantees with strategies they can use to build public will and engage the public as they race to the top.

## Spring into Action!

Spring is a great time to take stock—whether reviewing your advocacy plan or platform, building skills, or finding new ways to communicate to stakeholders. In this issue we highlight stories that show just how important effective communication is and provide new ACS tools and resources to help you accomplish your goals.

*Happy reading from all of us at ACS!*

## The Big News: Communication Matters

In the last few weeks, we've been very impressed with the [Making Ideas Move blog series](http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/making_ideas_move) ([www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/making\\_ideas\\_move](http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/making_ideas_move)) from the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](http://www.ssireview.org) ([www.ssireview.org](http://www.ssireview.org)), presented in partnership with [The Communications Network](http://www.comnetwork.org) ([www.comnetwork.org](http://www.comnetwork.org)). Each of these posts makes powerful arguments or shares compelling examples about the importance of communication. While pretty much everyone would agree that communication is important in theory, these stories quantify just how important it is—and why organizations would be well served to invest more in communicating.

In January, a blog post entitled, "[Meeting People Where They Are](http://www.ssireview.org/making_ideas_move/entry/meeting_people_where_they_are)" ([www.ssireview.org/making\\_ideas\\_move/entry/meeting\\_people\\_where\\_they\\_are](http://www.ssireview.org/making_ideas_move/entry/meeting_people_where_they_are)), provided a profile of the activities of the [Center for American Progress \(CAP\)](http://www.americanprogress.org) ([www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org)), a "nonpartisan educational institute" that spends 50%—that's right, *half*—of its operating budget on communication. As the blog author, Daniella Gibbs Leger, senior vice president for communication at CAP explains in her post, "Our senior team has embraced and invested in communication, and everyone at CAP sees communication as part of their work. I believe this is what sets us apart from many of our peers and why CAP attracts some of the brightest policy minds. And if you look at the most successful organizations—no matter their mission—you'll see that a strong and fully integrated communication strategy is always an important part of what they do."

For CAP, this effort has paid off handsomely for their work in the policy arena, from shifting public conversations about the war in Iraq in 2005 to reframing the debate around the federal budget in 2013. In each case, CAP not only offered an idea, but ignited conversation and support for it by working through multiple channels—blogs, social media, events—even a film series. This single organization has been able to help drive social change by engaging in robust communication.

That's a national example, but targeted communication is just as important at the local level. [CQ Roll Call](http://corporate.cqrollcall.com) (<http://corporate.cqrollcall.com>), a news and intelligence resource for advocates, recently published a case study entitled, "[\\$12,000. 70 Volunteers. 8 Ballot Victories](http://connectivity.cqrollcall.com/case-study-how-a-small-group-of-advocates-in-michigan-are-winning-the-weed-war)" (<http://connectivity.cqrollcall.com/case-study-how-a-small-group-of-advocates-in-michigan-are-winning-the-weed-war>)."

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## What's New: Powerful Tools to Further Your Work

ACS has new [resources](#) ([www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/tools-resources)) available for download now. If your work includes electoral advocacy or addressing the school-to-prison pipeline, be sure to check these out!

Election cycles give savvy nonprofits a powerful opportunity to ramp up infrastructure, engage candidates in public discussions, educate and activate voters, and analyze the impact of their efforts. But doing so effectively takes an effective electoral advocacy strategy. We've produced five must-have guides to help you navigate the process of effective electoral advocacy and develop a winning plan. Our toolkit includes:

1. [The Do's and Don'ts of Electoral Advocacy for 501\(c\)\(3\)s](#)
2. [Guide to Building an Effective Electoral Strategy for 501\(c\)\(3\)s](#)
3. [Guide to Organizing a Successful Voter Registration Effort for 501\(c\)\(3\)s](#)
4. [Guide to Developing a Successful GOTV Program for 501\(c\)\(3\)s](#)
5. [Guide to Hosting a Successful Candidate Forum for 501\(c\)\(3\)s](#)

## ACS Selected to Create Master Plan for Children, Youth, and Families

During 2015, the ACS team will be spending time in Little Rock, Arkansas, having been selected to guide the creation of the city's master plan for children, youth, and families. As part of this work, we'll be convening a wide variety of community stakeholders, including youth representatives, to gather their input about the needs, challenges and desires experienced by Little Rock's children, youth and families. We'll also research evidence-based approaches at work in other communities throughout the country that Little Rock can use to help its children, youth, and families improve their quality of life. Then, we'll help stakeholders weave their strengths into a comprehensive plan that will guide the work of multiple youth-serving agencies to achieve a common vision and goals. We are entering this work with two valuable partners on our team: The [Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation](#) ([www.wrfoundation.org](http://www.wrfoundation.org)) and Philander Smith College's [Social Justice Institute](#) ([www.philander.edu/social-justice](http://www.philander.edu/social-justice)). Together, we will help ensure that all of Little Rock's youth can grow into caring, contributing adults. ▲

## The ACS Team Shows Advocates New Skills at NAEYC Public Policy Forum

Two hundred [National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\)](#) ([www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)) members from 39 states gathered in Washington, DC for the annual Public Policy Forum on March 8–10, 2015 to prepare to meet with elected officials about the importance of early childhood.

On March 8, 2015 ACS president Lori McClung and policy associate Cassie Gaffney, along with Amy O'Leary, director of the [Early Education for All Campaign](#) ([www.strategiesforchildren.org/eea/EEA1\\_about.htm](http://www.strategiesforchildren.org/eea/EEA1_about.htm)), presented a four-hour interactive pre-conference session. More than 100 early childhood stakeholders from across the country, most without previous advocacy experience, came to the session to learn about the federal legislative and budget process, rules for nonprofit lobbying, and strategies and tactics for effectively engaging policymakers. The pre-conference day concluded with a policymaker-meeting workshop where participants had the opportunity to practice and hone their new skills alongside their colleagues.

Participants reported that information at the pre-conference was new and helpful, encouraged their colleagues back home to participate next year, and invited ACS to do similar trainings in their states. All resources from the pre-conference can be found here: [www.naeyc.org/policy/advocacy](http://www.naeyc.org/policy/advocacy). ▲

## ACS Team Spotlight

### Michelle Fitzgibbon, The Fitzgibbon Group

Working the Ohio Statehouse on behalf of various ACS clients is a formidable job that requires a skilled lobbying force. There are 132 legislators, plus state administrative staff, so creating a team to reach multiple contacts is an absolute must. That's why we're pleased to count Michelle Fitzgibbon and [The Fitzgibbon Group](http://www.fitzgibbongroup.com) among our allies and partners during the legislative session. A registered lobbyist for 15 years, Michelle has been part of various ACS projects during the past four years, monitoring legislative activity and gathering intelligence from legislators about pending and proposed bills. Michelle meets regularly with key legislators on a weekly basis to determine their levels of support for various proposals, then debriefs weekly with the rest of the ACS team to develop or adjust strategy and messaging.

"I have prior experience working in education lobbying, and working with ACS helps me keep my contacts active and work collaboratively on school related issues," says Michelle. "I really love the energy of this firm and their commitment and passion for their client's issues. I always welcome opportunities to collaborate with them because they are fun and passionate—just like me. We're always learning things from each other and we complement each other well!"



## The Big News: Communication Matters

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This case outlines the success of a tiny grassroots campaign to legalize marijuana use in several Michigan towns. The advocates were driven by polling results in each community, and supplemented that information with local experts who understood the nuances of the issue. "When it comes to predicting the behaviors of others, your gut isn't good enough," says the report. Informed with polling data and local expertise, the communication emphasis wasn't on creating a large public debate, but in using research to craft very targeted messages and delivering them one-on-one. "...there were no email, social media or print campaigns—and definitely no air time. Rather, the activists—some of them local—chatted up leaders at City Hall and then got out and knocked on doors." As a bonus, the edginess of the topic generated earned media to supplement the advocates' efforts. The \$12,000 budget wasn't large, but it was *entirely*—100%—devoted to getting the message out there.

Nonprofits often get mired in the day-to-day challenges of service delivery. But communication can change that. What could your organization do if it upped the ante in communication? How could you change behaviors, or policy, or investment in a way that shifted the environment in which you operate? How could even a nominal communication investment help you improve the service you offer—make it better, more targeted, or more effective?

When you consider those questions, you realize that communication is much more than just a tool—it's a means of transformation. ACS is ready and equipped to help you explore the possibilities. Let's [get in touch](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org/contact) to discuss your organization's communication transformation plan. ▲

**Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward?**

**Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?**

Contact one of our team members, call toll-free at 1-877-372-0166 or visit our website at [www.advocacyandcommunication.org](http://www.advocacyandcommunication.org)

Lori McClung, President, [lori@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:lori@advocacyandcommunication.org)

Scarlett Boudier, Vice President, [scarlett@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:scarlett@advocacyandcommunication.org)

Bobbie Beach, Executive Assistant, [bobbie@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:bobbie@advocacyandcommunication.org)

Rebecca Cohen, Senior Director, [rebecca@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:rebecca@advocacyandcommunication.org)

Cassie Gaffney, Policy Associate, [cassie@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:cassie@advocacyandcommunication.org)

Heather Lenz, Policy Associate, [heather@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:heather@advocacyandcommunication.org)

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Cleveland  
1277 West 104th St.  
Cleveland, OH 44102

Columbus  
2612 Zollinger Road  
Columbus, OH 43221

Washington, DC  
300 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Suite 900, PMB 9005  
Washington, DC 20001

Phoenix  
207 North Gilbert Road  
Suite 007  
Phoenix, AZ 85234

[advocacyandcommunication.org](http://advocacyandcommunication.org)

For more information about ACS please contact us at [info@advocacyandcommunication.org](mailto:info@advocacyandcommunication.org).