



Critical Components of a Public Awareness Campaign

When your organization decides to take on a key issue, creating public awareness and action is often critical to your success. But what exactly is a “public awareness campaign,” and how do you create one? This quick guide will help you understand the process of planning and developing a robust public awareness campaign, using our recommended set of components.

Keep in mind that your plan must be tailored toward the specific needs of your organization, community, and budget. Your plan might require additional or fewer components.

First, Some Key Definitions

Many advocacy and communications terms are used loosely and with varied meanings, so it helps if your campaign team is using commonly understood definitions. Here are key definitions to help eliminate confusion during the planning process and beyond:

Public Awareness Campaign

A comprehensive effort that includes multiple components (messaging, grassroots outreach, media relations, government affairs, budget, etc.) to help reach a specific goal. A public awareness campaign is **not** just billboards, television commercials, social media or fundraising.

Messaging

A series of words and phrases that are most persuasive to key audiences, based on specific research. Messaging is **not** utilizing words or phrases that sound good or that we think have been persuasive in the past.

Public Education

Utilizing messaging to help proactively engage key audiences in your issue and asking them to respond to a specific call to action to help achieve your goal. Public education is **not** simply talking to people, placing ads, or having a static Facebook page.

Public Relations

A variety of activities that help an organization and its stakeholders adapt, learn, and understand more about one another. Public relations is **not** the exclusive use of messaging or paid media to reach a goal.

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Create Your Public Awareness Campaign Toolbox



Secure the Right Software

Any public awareness campaign or outreach effort must have a full interactive online platform to build and engage key audiences as described below. Look for one that's web-based and database-driven, that allows you to segment and personalize email communications, that gives audiences the ability to directly engage with you, and provides technical support.



Plan Grassroots Organizing/Outreach

Grassroots organizing is the proactive gathering of support at the local level for your issue or goal. The result is a formal or informal network of supporters whom you can ask to act on behalf of your issue or goal (e.g., write letters, make calls and ask others to do the same). This network is usually unpaid, and motivated by a desire for change. Gathering the support of community leaders, known as “grasstops,” is usually included in this outreach, although their role can differ from grassroots supporters (see below). For example, a campaign about K-12 education might include:

Grassroots

- Parents
- Parent organizations
- Teachers

Grasstops

- Superintendents
- Business leaders
- Funders
- Policymakers



Leverage Community Leaders or “Grasstops”

Community leaders or “grasstops” individuals can carry your campaign message to a specific set of audiences that other supporters cannot reach. Grasstops should be engaged on a regular and ongoing basis to help leverage other leaders, their own members/supporters, in-kind and cash resources, and caché.



Develop Champions

Within your target audience(s), you must proactively engage individuals and groups to ensure they are active on behalf of your campaign. The process of developing champions sits within your grassroots outreach plan but requires a more specific level of detail about why, how, and when to engage each champion and maintain their support over time. Having strong, well-developed champions is critical to grassroots success and your overall campaign effort.



Engage with Government

Effective government affairs work begins with relationship development with local, state and federal public officials. Start by educating public officials about your issue, and then work to integrate those public officials within some component of the broader campaign, effort or goal.



Create a Media Relations Strategy

Coordinated media strategies with multiple media outlets will help push forward messaging throughout every campaign component. The three most common examples of media strategies are:

- Social (Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc)
- Earned (articles placed in news outlets at no cost)
- Paid (ads and information you pay for)

Specific media strategies should always fit the goals, target audiences, and resources available to your campaign. Media should support the other components, not vice versa.



Develop a Comprehensive Implementation Plan

Create a detailed document that describes the goals and tactical activities attached to each component of your public awareness campaign. This document will help you understand and track the status and success of each tactical activity. Even the best campaign plan can lose momentum and organization without a detailed implementation plan.



Leverage Complementary Programs

Not every program at your organization will be linked to your public awareness campaign. Those programs can, however, help buttress the overall effort. For example, a program or research division can help inform talking point development or provide strategic direction for a particular target audience.



Tie Into National, Statewide, and Regional Efforts

Study the broader landscape to determine how you can leverage and/or learn from others to help forward or inform your own campaign goals. Organizations, community leaders or consultants that are steeped in such information can help you navigate this issue and strengthen your efforts.



Pay Attention to Fundraising & Budgeting

Developing a specific fundraising budget is critical for your campaign and deserves its own attention and strategy. Without proper short- and long-term fundraising and budgeting strategies, your public awareness campaign will have a difficult time securing supporters and is likely to struggle to reach its goal.



Create Collateral Materials

You must develop materials specifically for the goals and tactics of your campaign. General materials about your organization will not suffice, nor will they reflect the strategy and messaging demands of your campaign. Some examples include:

- Talking Points
- Fact Sheets
- Strategy specific brochures
- Training materials
- Issue briefs

Remember, not every public awareness campaign includes every component. Choose what's right for you and create a campaign that gets results!