Messaging & the Media
July 16, 2009
Session Agenda

• Planning strategic communications
• Messaging building blocks
• Becoming a media magnet
• Tools & tactics
• **The Fun Part:** spokesperson training
Strategic Communications Planning
Key Components & Moving Parts

- Informed by overall policy goals
- Spell out challenges & opportunities
- Get buy-in from allies/partners
- Train back-up spokespeople
- Get out early
Building Power With Media

- News clips = first step
- Get public interested
- Change the public debate
- Grab policy makers’ attention
- Change policies
Message Building Blocks: A Formula for Success
“Are You Talking to Me?”

- Elected Officials
- Stakeholders
- Potential Allies & Activists
- General Public/Media
Becoming a Media Magnet
Good Media Doesn’t Just Happen

• Find story “hook”
• Clever subject line in email
• Know news cycle
• Frame your narrative
• Be bold to break through
• Follow up with a phone call
Key Ingredients to Good Stories

- Highlight real people, human interest
- Counterintuitive
- Local
- Fascinating facts, new research
- Tap into current trends
- Unique partnerships, 3\textsuperscript{rd} parties
Example: The States and the Stimulus Report

**Goal:** Shift conversation around stimulus by highlighting best & worst practices in state stimulus spending on transportation

**Challenge:** Attract media/policymaker attention to a dense and nuanced subject matter

**Solution:** Produce a 120-Day Report
Example: Framing Your Story

- Expanded frame from numbers of jobs created & amount of money spent  

TO

- What kinds of projects were funded & benefits of those projects relative to one another
Example: Knowing the News Cycle

- Pegged report release to 120-day deadline

- Remained nimble & adjusted release strategy to dovetail w/ last minute WH press conference

- Pitched the story as the *first comprehensive* analysis of state spending decisions

- Ranked the states according to their performance
Example: Be Bold to Break Through

- In order to grab reporters’ attention, the pitch went (a little) further than the report

- We offered advanced copies of the report to give reporters a “scoop”
Example: How’d we do?

The report was covered in over 45 news outlets including:

- Washington Post
- TIME Magazine
- Fox Business News
- Reuters
- San Francisco Chronicle
- Baltimore Sun
- Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Tools & Tactics
Tools & Tactics

- Pitch Prep & Materials
- Op-Eds & Letters to the Editor
- Ed Board Meetings
- One-on-One Briefings or Panels
- Press Conferences & Tele-briefings
- Social Networking
- Strategic Events
Media Monitoring

- Builds relationship with reporters
- Helps to keep on top of the news cycle
- Enhances reputation as a knowledgeable source
- Saves time by using technology
The Lede: 10 Seconds to Make an Impression

Remember the Inverted Pyramid:

- Most Significant Conclusion/Finding
- Additional Explanations
- Details

Lead with your most critical information
Staging a Press Conference

• How will it be newsworthy

• Include “big” names

• Create drama with a bold event

• Think what if the TV’s muted
Social Networks: Put your List to Work

- Becomes a key component to communications
- Provides a way for content to spread organically
- Makes your organization accessible, build relationships, get people talking
- Interactivity = Two-way street
Growth in Online Social Networks

Growth in Use of Online Social Networks

- ever used
- yesterday

% of internet users who use online social networks

Feb-05, Sep-05, Aug-06, May-08, Aug-08, Dec-08

M+R STRATEGIC SERVICES
• 175 million registered users worldwide

• More than 24 million pieces of content—links, news stories, blog posts, notes, and photos—are shared each month

• The fastest-growing user demographic is over age 30
• More than 4 million users worldwide—752% growth in 2008

• 11% of online adults in America have used the service

• The median age of a Twitter user is 31

• Twitter users are more likely than any other online segment to use blogs and share information and links online
Overcoming Challenges

• Too much noise!

• Social networks emerged as tool for individuals, not organizations

• Significant time commitment for staffer(s)

• Difficult to convert social network “friends” to donors and activists
How are they doing it?

- Cultivating engaged activists & asking them to get more involved
- Capitalizing on breaking news and real-world problems
- Integrating timing of online actions with offline campaigning and lobbying events
- Focusing on aspects of T4’s work that people have demonstrated interest in (e.g. livable communities and public transportation)
My Commute Sucks

Take it up with Congress

Sign the Petition!

Stop pouring billions into a broken system. Transportation shouldn’t be an expensive, dirty burden. Fix it, clean it, make it work!

Yes! I want Congress to fix my commute!

First Name
Last Name
Email

Tell us your experience

Let it all out!
Using Twitter and Facebook...
Where to Start?

• Start small
• Figure out who you know
• Find your allies
• Make a good first impression
• Prepare to lose control
• Feed the beast
• Spend time
• Give people something to do
The Art of the Interview
Securing the interview is just the first step, ensuring your message gets through the filter can be difficult.
Before the Interview

- Do your research, be prepared
- Anticipate tough Q’s
- Practice “bridge & pivot”
- Know the facts, key messages
- Confirm angle of interview
Sealing the Deal: Staying on Message

- Clear, concise & confident
- Keep to 3-4 key points
- Avoid jargon, buzz words or acronyms
- Highlight your message: Flag it
• That may be the case, but one thing to consider is…
• That’s a good point (interesting Q), but the main consideration is…
• We all agree w/ that but what’s at issue is…
• That’s not my area of expertise but I can tell you…
Flagging Techniques

• The important point here is…
• The best part about…
• There are 2 reasons why…
• Let me put that into perspective…
• What that means is…
No Matter What Don’t …

- Answer a hypothetical, speculate
- Guess, bluff or lie (they’ll check)
- Say “no comment” or overreact
- Give long, complex answers
- Criticize the media
Tips for Television (Live & Taped)

- Sit straight in your chair, don’t swivel
- Use hands effectively
- Make eye contact with host (or camera) & use their name
- Correct mistakes politely
- Speak clearly, not too fast
- You are the expert
Example: Geoff’s Fox Business Channel Interview
Bashing the Boss: How’d he do?

- Control the conversation
- Deliver *core* sound bite sooner
- Less is more
- Bridge & Pivot
Scenario:

The state budget is under negotiation in the state legislature. Your group is part of a coalition advocating for increased funding for public transportation and policies that encourage and provide incentives for transit-oriented development. The local weekend morning news show would like to interview your group about the state’s budget and why increased funding for transit and T.O.D. should or should not be included.
Activity: Honing your Spokesperson Skills

Challenge:

• Crystallize key messages for use with reporters and policymakers

• Prepare appropriate responses

• Mock interview