



American Heart Association
MAKING EACH DAY HEALTHIER FOR ALL CHILDREN™



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



MESSAGE AND MEDIA ADVOCACY

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INTRODUCTION

At the core of your campaign is how you communicate about your work to decision-makers, volunteers, advocates and the public. Your goal is not just to provide them with more information, but to move them to action. To do this effectively, your campaign needs to develop clear and persuasive ways of talking about the issue you are working on (messages), and strategies for getting your message out to key audiences (media advocacy).

In this section, we will cover how to integrate communications into your campaign by developing and deploying persuasive messaging to tell the story of your work. We will also address how to get your message out — both proactively and reactively — through media, digital and social channels for advocacy purposes.

MESSAGE

Messages are the starting point for how you talk to your audiences about the work you are doing and the change you want to see. They are the backbone from which the rest of your copy and collateral, including talking points, speeches, handouts and materials, and website copy, are developed. They should provide your audience with context, a sense of urgency, and/or possible next steps. Most importantly, well-crafted messages allow you to get your point across in the way that you want.

<i>Messages are...</i>	<i>Messages are not...</i>
✓ Clear, compelling, accurate — and short!	✗ A summary of everything you do
✓ For your audience(s)	✗ Written to appeal to you (though they may)
✓ Foundational language to inform all of your communications	✗ A list of facts or data
✓ Evolving as needed	✗ Sacred, unchanging or set in stone
✓ A guide, a jumping off point	✗ A script or talking points

Types of Messages

There are several types of messages you can use in explaining your work, the urgency of it, and what you want your audience to do. Whether you use this specific structure or not, you should make sure your messaging touches on these areas:

- ▶ **Problem — what are you trying to solve through your work?** Provide your audience with context about the issue you are seeking to address or fix.
- ▶ **Solution — how are we going to solve it?** Describe what you and others plan to do or have done about the problem. The solution helps your audience invest energy or become engaged in the issue.
- ▶ **Ask — what do you want your audience to do?** Provide your audience with clear next steps.
- ▶ **Urgency — why is it important that this happen now?** Be explicit about why now is the time to act. What will happen if nothing is done? What do we stand to lose or how will the problem get worse? You may even be so explicit as to say, “All this is important right now because...” Using the timing of the legislative session or decision can be a starting point for urgency.
- ▶ **Hope — what does the future look like if we succeed?** Explain why you’re seeking change. The ask is to get you one step closer, and the “hope” message is about where you’re headed or your ultimate goal. You could say “My hope is that someday soon (or name a timeframe), our work will... (lead to what positive change?).” Think about how the change you seek will impact the decision makers’ constituents.

Guidelines for Messages

- ▶ **Be values driven.** Messaging should tap into your audience’s values and beliefs. It’s not enough to have facts on your side — people need to see how your work aligns with what motivates them. Work hard to understand your audience’s values knowing they may be different than yours.
- ▶ **Prioritize audiences and be specific.** You may need to engage more than one audience, but identify who you are primarily speaking to. Your messages will be most effective when they are closely tailored to a specific audience. If you have different target audiences, you may need different messages. However, you should have different variations of your messages, rather than wildly different sets of messages. Be as specific as possible and prioritize your audiences based on your strategic goals. “The public” is not an audience. Who exactly are you thinking of? Is it parents of elementary school kids who get lunch at school? The more specific you are about the audience the better your messaging will be.
- ▶ **Think action.** Messaging should aim to move someone to act. Be clear about solutions and think about how your messages will inspire your audience to be involved.
- ▶ **Be strategic.** Identify the themes and supporting facts that will be most persuasive to your target audience. Messaging will often be framed slightly differently for different audiences (such as policymakers versus grassroots advocates), but they should never contradict other messages.
- ▶ **Make it as local as possible.** People care most about what they see and experience in their daily lives. Policymakers want to see how this issue plays out in their jurisdiction.
- ▶ **Make it personal.** An emotional connection will be more memorable than messaging that solely relies on facts and figures. Identify great stories — a CPR save, a school that has successfully implemented PE, a student who is now eating healthy because of the new school meals standards, etc. — and use it.

Developing Your Messages

You will evolve and refine your messages throughout the course of your campaign. The section below will guide you through the process of developing your initial set of core messages.

Start by gathering information and materials that will help you develop your messages. Voices for Healthy Kids has done much to develop messaging and build a base of key facts and research for our key policy priorities. Check in with our [national resources and toolkits](#) to see what messaging and evidence has been developed around your issue.

Additionally, talk to the advocacy issue leads to identify successful campaigns on similar issues around the country to utilize those resources and messaging.

You'll want to develop core collateral or campaign materials, including: a fact sheet on the issue, sample media release, PowerPoint presentation, etc. (Note: Science review will be necessary for these resources unless you use statistics from the science approved "[fast facts](#)" documents.) All of these will be informed by your core messages.

In addition to these existing resources, you may want to consider public opinion research or polling around your issue area that has already been done. This research can help you understand how the public thinks about, talks about and processes information related to the issue. Research findings provide insight into how to best craft messages to engage the public in a conversation about the campaign. You may also want to release results to create momentum and build even more public support. Here are a few tips for considering opinion polling and research:

- ▶ **Findings are not messages.** While incredibly useful to inform your messaging, findings from a national poll, focus group or study are not messages themselves.
- ▶ **Do a research scan.** Has your team conducted any research on this topic in the past? Or do you know of any existing research at a national, state or regional level? Checking with the advocacy issue lead is always a good idea. Consider how you can build off those learnings to create strong messaging. Make sure you've done a media scan as well to understand how the media has covered the issue, who's frequently quoted and what they say.
- ▶ **Consider partners and other thought leaders.** How are others talking about this issue? How can your messaging complement and fit into an existing conversation or help you to stand out?
- ▶ **Evaluate the poll, survey, or focus groups.** What is the overall purpose of the research (is the intent to craft messages, or perhaps to show support for your work)? What do you hope to learn? Where do you plan to conduct the research? What is the population that you plan to study? Is this research for internal or external use?

Work with your communications staff and/or the media advocacy manager with Voice for Healthy Kids to build key messaging, stories and the most resonant facts to support your case into your campaign plan timeline. Be prepared to adjust your messages if they are not resonating with your target audience. You may consider conducting an informal focus group with members of the community or others in your target audience. This can be a helpful way to test your messages with your audience and refine them based on their feedback. This can range from getting feedback on your messages from trusted community members, to bringing in a few people from your primary audience to react to your messages and discuss as a group. Think about the people you have access to and the best way for your campaign to get feedback on your messages directly from your audience.

Think Strategically

Your messaging should be directly tied to what your campaign is trying to accomplish. It's important to start with an understanding of your strategic vision so you can develop messages that clearly communicate it. You may already have the following points identified, but it is a helpful exercise, and crucial in developing messages, to get them down on paper.

Use the worksheet below to help you think through your vision.

Vision. What is the change you're trying to make? Think big! Put another way, what does the world look like when you have nothing left to advocate for?

Goal. What is a clear change that you want to accomplish to make progress toward your vision?

Milestones. What needs to change (or be set into motion) to accomplish your goal?

Note: There are likely more than one of these. Think about whether you need a policy to change, to change how a policy is implemented or to change behavior.

Defining Your Audiences

Once you've clarified the strategic framing for your messaging, you can zero in on your audience. You may want to think through the different types of audiences you need to engage (e.g. elected officials, policymakers, healthcare influencers, grassroots volunteers, organizational allies, etc.) but remember to be as specific as possible in defining your primary audiences. Picture a specific person who is an example of that audience to help you clearly identify your primary target.

Use the worksheet below to outline your audiences.

<p>Who are your primary audiences? Who specifically has the power to help you accomplish your advocacy goal?</p>	
<p>What do you want your audience to do?</p>	
<p>What's in it for them?</p>	

Writing Messages

With your strategic vision and audiences in mind, you can now begin to develop your messaging. This is an iterative process, and your messages should be continuously refined based on internal discussion and external feedback.

Use the worksheet below to begin writing your messages.

Note: when filling out this worksheet, you should do so as if you were speaking to your audience.

Problem. Tell us about the problem (provide context)?

Solution. Tell us about the solutions.

Ask. What do you want your audience (from above) to do?

Urgency. Why is it urgent?
Why today and not tomorrow?

Hope. What do you hope will
ultimately happen or be different?



USING MESSAGES IN ADVOCACY

Planning and Preparation



Step 1: Identify the Right Spokespeople

It is important to identify key advocates who can serve in a spokesperson role. In fact, the messenger may be just as important, or more important, than the message itself. Consider keeping a list or a database of spokespersons, including their area of expertise and contact information. This will enable your team to quickly respond to any media requests.

When identifying a spokesperson for your campaign, start with the community you are working on behalf of. In almost all cases, the best spokespersons come from the community with whom you are working. Policy or scientific expertise is very useful, and having experts who you can draw on as spokespersons is

important, but it's more effective to hear about an issue from someone who has direct, personal experience or can relate to your audience. There is no hard and fast rule to the number of spokespersons you should have.

Begin to build your list by thinking through your strategic communications goals, your messaging, the types of scenarios you may need to respond to, who has expressed interest or is engaged in your campaign, and who your audiences are. Here are a few considerations to take into account when identifying spokespersons:





Expertise. What expertise do you need? Can someone add credibility to the issue? Some examples of expert spokespeople include:

- ▶ A community member who is recognized as a trusted leader in their community
- ▶ A nutritionist for school meals or sugary drink tax work
- ▶ A Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program manager or city planner for SRTS, complete streets or walking and biking appropriations campaign
- ▶ A SNAP recipient to talk about incentives
- ▶ A classroom teacher to talk about the importance of PE
- ▶ Youth advocates for school-based policy priorities
- ▶ Cardiovascular disease patients and caregivers

Connection to the issue. Do they have a personal story or lived experience? How are they impacted by the policies you are advocating? Can they talk about how the policy change will change/improve their lives/affect their kids? Do you have spokespeople who can speak to an issue from different perspectives?

Geographic location. Where is coverage needed?

- ▶ Do you have different areas of the state covered (including urban and suburban areas)?
- ▶ Do you have different key legislative districts covered?
- ▶ Who should you specifically recruit to cover this?

Priority populations. Are they authentic voices that represent the communities that will be impacted by or benefit from the policy? All of the advocacy priorities of Voices for Healthy Kids have an equity impact, and it's important that the spokespeople engaged in the campaign represent the populations which are most impacted by the issue.

- ▶ Priority populations include communities of color, low-income communities, rural communities, and tribal communities.
- ▶ When recruiting the priority populations, it's important to ensure that it is their voice and experiences being shared.
- ▶ Coalition partners and stakeholders who represent priority populations are critically important when it comes to identifying, recruiting and training these spokespeople.



Step 2: Train Your Spokespeople

Once you have identified spokespeople, training is critical—both in key campaign messages and in how to talk to the media, legislators, stakeholders, and community members. Your spokespeople are great messengers and have the ability to give your messages real-world context, but they need to know the messages and be prepared to deliver them in their own words.

Conducting an initial training with a group of spokespeople at the beginning of the campaign can be a great way to get them comfortable with messaging and to get them thinking about the stories and examples they can use. Then, when media requests come in, they've had some practice and you can run a quick prep session for that specific interview.

Spokesperson Message Training

Goal: Help spokespeople get comfortable with your messaging, identify and practice stories and examples they can use and practice delivering messaging and stories in interview format.

This is best done as a group session with multiple spokespeople and is focused on helping them get comfortable with the messaging. Give them opportunities to read through the messaging and practice saying the messages out loud. Encourage them to adapt the messaging into their own words (without straying too far) and then provide opportunities for them to practice delivering the messages in mock-interview scenarios.

Strategies for Mock-Interviews

Run through practice interviews with your spokespeople and give them feedback. Here are some tips to help maximize your practice:

- ▶ **Ask questions like someone not steeped in this work (or already on your side).** Take off your campaign hat for the interview and approach the practice as if you are someone who knows little about the work.

This is crucial to prepare spokespeople for interviews with reporters who may not have a good understanding of the issue. It will also help you to listen for jargon or concepts that your audience may not understand.

- ▶ **Ask broad questions.** Don't just ask them to repeat the messages. Ask broad questions and challenge your spokespeople to focus in on the key points.
- ▶ **Anticipate the types of questions they'll most likely be asked.** Think through the questions you expect they would be asked and practice those so they are prepared if and when they do come up.
- ▶ **Test how they handle tough questions.** Think through the difficult questions they are afraid they'll be asked. These questions may not be asked, but preparing for the toughest questions will help them feel more confident in responding to easier questions.
- ▶ **Record and listen or watch it back.** As painful as it may be, recording and watching an interview is incredibly helpful. You may also hear new ideas or language to add to messages. You don't need fancy equipment. Just use your smartphone.
- ▶ **Identify what you want to do better.** The more practice they have, the better they will be. Give feedback and then provide them with more opportunities to practice so they can apply it. Ask for their self-reflection as well. Group feedback can also be instructive for everyone if you are able to practice in a group of 2-3 spokespeople. When giving feedback, look for a few common mistakes:
 - ▶ Too abstract or no story
 - ▶ Not getting to the key message or why the audience should care quickly
 - ▶ Using jargon
 - ▶ Talking too long



Step 3: Develop a Strategy to Reach Your Audiences

Make sure your message dissemination and communications outreach is tied to your strategic vision.

Use the worksheet below to help you outline a strategy to reach your audiences.

Note: answer these questions for one audience and repeat for additional priority audiences.

<p>Identify audience influencers. Who influences your primary audience? Who do they listen to or trust?</p>	
<p>Prioritize media. What media outlets, reporters, etc. does your audience read?</p>	
<p>Prioritize social channels. What social media platforms does your audience use?</p>	
<p>Fill a need. What does your audience need (research, experts, data, stories, etc.) to be persuaded — or advocate on your behalf?</p>	

USING MESSAGES IN ADVOCACY

Media Advocacy

Once you have developed the strategy for reaching your audiences, you can begin to think about the best way to implement it. There are many ways to go about this, but they generally fall into two categories:

- 1 **Proactive Media Advocacy:** Spreading your messages and receiving publicity through promotional efforts and outreach to media.
- 2 **Reactive Media Advocacy:** Responding to incoming requests from the media or external opportunities to shape a conversation with your messages.

Proactive Media Outreach

Either you send out a news release, statement, etc. or you contact reporters and pitch a story to them. Work with your communications team to develop proactive media outreach efforts and incorporate them into your overall campaign plan and timeline. You should be in touch regularly with your communications partners so that you can capitalize on media opportunities that arise during the campaign.

This will help you build relationships with media contacts who may have an interest in your issue and will help ensure earned media during your campaign.

Planning steps

Advocacy and communications staff should come together to:

- ▶ Review the issue
 - ▶ Establish a regular meeting schedule
 - ▶ Develop a list of media contacts. Who may be interested in the issue? Reporters that cover the state legislature are just one group—are there others? For example: What about the food reporters for healthy food access? Education reporters for PE? Business reporters for procurement? This list should
- evolve and change over time but it's important to start with a solid core group of reporters that you want to target. One of the best ways to find these reporters is to look at what they've covered in the past. Do they write on your issues? Have they covered your organization?
- ▶ Where are your targeted districts? Are there local newspapers or radio stations in those communities?

Proactive Media Outreach Tactics

- ▶ **News Releases and Statements.** You can use a press release, or statement to contact journalists to announce something newsworthy.
- ▶ **Media Availability/Advance Media Quotes.** You can use a quote (as a standalone or part of a larger press release/statement) to provide reporters with a comment on stories coming out as breaking news. You can also let reporters know that you have experts or spokespeople who can comment on a breaking news issue with a media availability notice.
- ▶ **Letters to the Editor.** Respond to a specific article or topic covered by an outlet with a letter to the editor (LTE). Timing is key. An LTE response to an article should be submitted the same day the article runs and is generally around 150 words. The How to Write an LTE resource will be helpful: <https://procurement.voicesforhealthykids.org/resources/write-a-letter-to-the-editor/>
- ▶ **Op-Ed.** An op-ed is a powerful opportunity to tell a story and explain your work on your terms. Most newspapers and many online publications will accept these guest opinion pieces that respond to an issue of the day, but not to a specific article in a paper. More op-ed writing tips available here: <https://procurement.voicesforhealthykids.org/build-a-campaign/mobilize/op-eds-matter/>



- ▶ **News Conferences.** If you have a compelling visual or event, a news conference is an opportunity to provide information and point of view to the media on a particular issue. You could use this as a launching point for your campaign or coalition announcement. These may include elected officials, advocates, scientists, physicians and other issue experts. Reporters are always looking for “real people,” so aside from having experts present, also try to have people who are invested in the messaging. For example, if you are working on Head Start, try to have a parent, child and/or teacher there.
- ▶ **Day at the Capitol/Legislative Breakfasts.** These arranged briefings or scheduled visits on a particular issue are effective tools to inform legislators and their staff about an issue area. For a briefing, media can be invited as a secondary audience. More tips available here: <https://procurement.voicesforhealthykids.org/build-a-campaign/mobilize/days-at-the-capitol/>
- ▶ **Share Testimony and Legislative Letters with Reporters.** When a topic is “hot” with a reporter, they will always be looking for new angles to pursue on the issue. Share testimony you are delivering and letters you are writing as a way to show continued momentum on an issue that may inspire another story.
- ▶ **Deskside Meetings with Reporters/Editors.** A face-to-face meeting with local reporters or editors can be very helpful in establishing real connections with the media.

- ▶ **Editorial Board Visits.** Similar to a deskside meeting, an editorial board meeting is a great opportunity to meet with the editorial staff of a newspaper to provide education on a specific issue or range of topics.
- ▶ **Media Roundtable.** You may want to organize an event in which the media are invited to participate in a roundtable discussion on an issue with other members of the media. More information available here: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/media-roundtable-guidebook/>

Maximize Earned Media:

When you’ve achieved a proactive success, don’t stop there! Think about ways you can maximize the impact of that success:

- ▶ Repost and share supportive materials (including advertisements) on social media pages and on your website. Consider boosting your social media efforts with paid ads. You can spend as little or as much as your budget allows. (See more in the digital media section below).
- ▶ Encourage volunteers to look for opportunities to respond to local media stories. Once a letter to the editor is published, ask the volunteer to send it to their lawmaker.
- ▶ Once the op-ed or key article is published, format it and send it to key legislative offices.

Reactive Media Outreach

Reactive media advocacy is all about being prepared and jumping at opportunities. Most of this work is done through the planning stages of developing messages, identifying spokespeople and training them. You should also think through a process and strategy for when you want to respond. Remember, you don't have to respond to every request you get from the media, but if you are prepared, a request is an opportunity to share your messages.

- ▶ Ensure that members of your advocacy and communications team are regularly monitoring media, social media and blogs for any coverage of your issue, and be prepared to jump at opportunities. Google Alerts are a simple way to do this.
- ▶ Be prepared with talking points, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), counter-arguments, and answers to tough questions you think may arise.
- ▶ Establish a “rapid response team” to react to opposition or seize opportunities. This will be your communications staff, advocacy staff, coalition partners and key spokespeople who are trained to quickly respond with the correct talking points and counter-arguments.
- ▶ Be strategic in your response — every criticism of the issue does not warrant a response. Sometimes the best response is to let the comment on the news article, the blog, letter to the editor, etc., quietly fade into the background rather than amplifying it with a response. Work with your communications staff to determine when a response is warranted.

Paid Media

One other approach to proactive media outreach to consider is paid media, which refers to media that is purchased to publicize your message.

There are many paid media strategies that may be pursued. Examples include: radio ads, banner ads online, newspaper ads, billboards, bus signs, television

ads, podcast ads, social media ads or “boosts” and Google AdWords. Paid media can get very expensive; it should be carefully planned to reach your intended target audience(s) and maximize impact through grassroots tactics such as incorporating the ad in an action alert to be shared with lawmakers.

Here are a few questions to answer before pursuing paid media strategies:

- ▶ **Who is your audience?** Who is your target audience for the paid media? If this is not your campaign target, how will the audience be able to influence your target?
- ▶ **Where is the best place to reach that audience and influence them?** Think about what your audience reads, listens to, and watches. Where are they most likely to see your message? Think creatively and consider more than just traditional media outlets. Neighborhood newspapers, school newspapers, church bulletins, and other newsletters like updates from local chambers of commerce, are great local options that may also be less expensive.
- ▶ **What's your budget?** What can be done with the funds you have? Is it possible to tap coalition partners to help with in-kind design work or direct financial assistance? Do you have lobbying dollars or non-lobbying dollars for the paid media? This will determine the focus of the ad: whether it is educational (non-lobbying) or has a grassroots call to action (lobbying). Work with your grant staff to determine what is permissible with non-lobbying dollars.
- ▶ **What do you want the product to look like, and what is your capacity for design?** Can the paid media be done in-house or do you need to find an external consultant to produce the ad/image/recording? Does the American Heart Association (AHA) have examples from other states or are there ads from the Voices for Healthy Kids toolkits that may be customized for your campaign?

Digital Advocacy

Digital outreach is useful in both providing another outlet for you to communicate directly with your audiences and maximizing and amplifying proactive and reactive media successes. AHA's guiding value of meeting people where they are means we must be present on the social media platforms where our audiences already spend their time.

Having a digital strategy and plan for how your campaign will use social media is not an afterthought; it is a critical part of your communications strategy.

How can digital content help?

- ▶ **Add to ongoing conversation.** You don't necessarily need to start an online conversation about your issue to have impact. In fact, there may already be one that you can add to. Your reach through social and digital platforms is tied to the size of your audience. When you are starting out, check to see if there are relevant hashtags and active conversations about the issue area. Look to see what other thought leaders are doing, and think about how you can position your campaign to add something valuable.
- ▶ **Establish a brand and persona.** You can develop how your campaign is viewed by your audience. Through your digital and social channels, you can establish your organization's voice and the way you talk about the issues you care about. Your messaging should provide the starting point. You should also think through a consistent tone and style (e.g. how do you want to use hashtags across posts? What abbreviations are acceptable? How do you want to refer to your organization and others, etc.).
- ▶ **Build a supporter base/online community.** Digital and social outreach can help you to grow your campaign. By directly connecting with people in the community, you can engage them to share news about your campaign, advocate and be a champion for the issue, volunteer, or even find spokespeople. This doesn't happen overnight, but with a strategic approach to engaging supporters you can grow your online community.
- ▶ **Inform and educate.** Digital communications through channels like social media and direct email allow you to have total control over your message. You can use this to keep people up to date on the latest news and inform them about the issue. As you provide followers with consistent and useful content, they will hopefully share it with others and, in turn, grow your audience.
- ▶ **Be a "thought leader."** A long term goal, you can establish your campaign as a leader on the issue. This starts by building, informing and engaging with your supporter base as you provide them with useful and shareable information about the issue. As your network grows, more and more people will look to you for information and news. In addition, engaging with other thought leaders — reporters, legislators and their staff, experts, decision-makers, etc. — both digitally and through proactive outreach will help you become a go-to resource for them and establish your campaign on the issue.

Digital Strategic Planning

Digital content strategy is about the content you're producing, and the platforms where you're putting it in order to help achieve your organizational goals. It starts with identifying your strategic goals and capacity for digital and then identifying the most efficient ways to achieve those goals.

Use the worksheet below to help you plan your digital strategy.

What do you want to accomplish through digital?	
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Who do you want to talk to? Do they use social? If so, how?	
--	--

What's already happening on social media in the issue space?	
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Digital Strategic Planning (continued)

Digital content strategy is about the content you're producing, and the platforms where you're putting it, in order to help achieve your organizational goals. It starts with identifying your strategic goals and capacity for digital and then identifying the most efficient ways to achieve those goals.

Use the worksheet below to help you plan your digital strategy.

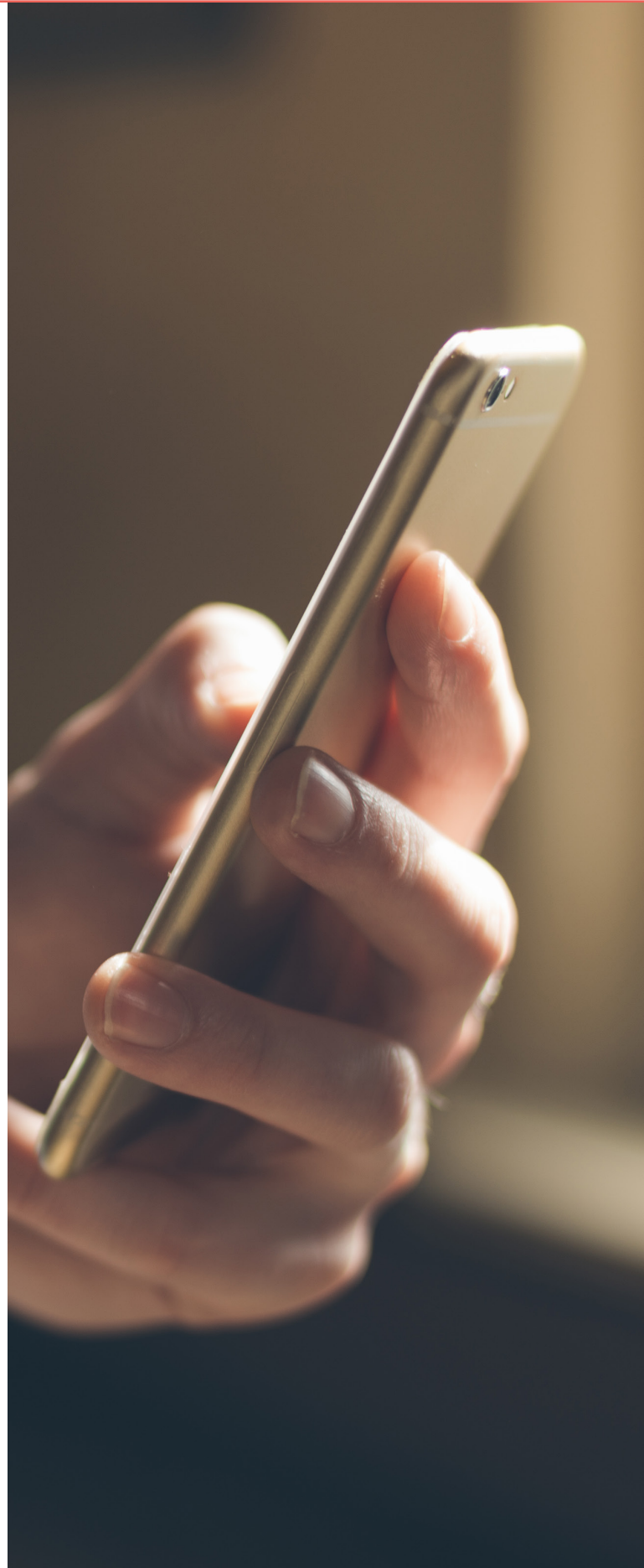
Are there comparable organizations that are doing this well?

What's your capacity?

What is your budget?

Digital and social platforms and how you can use them:

- ▶ **Facebook.** While it is still the largest platform, the audience is increasingly older and the algorithm controlling what people see isn't equitable. Facebook emphasizes content based on what type of users are engaging with it, the content type (video and visual) and how popular it is. Some ad money is essential to have a big impact on Facebook. You will only reach approximately 10% of your followers without boosting posts. It is still an important platform and useful tool to organize events and update your network. Two to three updates a week is normal, but be sure to think about maximizing visual content and engaging with your audience creatively.
- ▶ **Facebook Live.** A useful and easy-to-use tool to connect with your followers through live video. Think about a Facebook Live from an event or fundraiser or a periodic live chat with followers to update them and allow them to ask questions.
- ▶ **Twitter.** This platform is a great way to reach influencers, as well as new and existing allies. Character limit forces you to be concise and direct. The conversation on Twitter is fast-paced (timely updates are essential) and you can tweet something more than once. Engaging with others will lead to more success, but this platform is also a great space to stay on top of news on a topic. Check hashtags to tap into existing conversations on relevant topics and consider making and regularly updating Twitter "Lists" of important influencers, media and legislators so you can easily search whether a subject is getting pickup in a certain community.
 - ▶ **Periscope.** Twitter's version of Facebook Live. Periscope helps followers feel they're in the inner circle & getting updates first.
 - ▶ **Twitter Chats.** These can be useful to engage a large number of influencers. Success will depend on the size of your audience, promotional work and experts you've engaged. Consider partnering with other organizations or campaigns to sponsor a Twitter chat to tap into a larger network.



- ▶ **Instagram.** One of the fastest growing platforms, Instagram is a place for great visuals only. While it is less likely to drive traffic to your website or other platform, it is a great way for followers to deepen their understanding of who you are and what you do. Make sure to include the link to your website in your bio. When you post, you can add a “link in bio” text to remind followers that they can get more info by clicking that link.
 - ▶ **Instagram Stories.** These are videos and photos that disappear after 24 hours, often done as a series. Increasingly popular thanks to promotion from the company, these are a helpful way to provide an informal look into your campaign and the work you’re doing. If you would like to save these clips for your followers to see at a later time, you can organize them into Story Highlights, which serve as digital albums for your content.
- ▶ **LinkedIn.** Largely a professional network, LinkedIn can be an effective platform to establish thought leadership in an industry or knowledge area. Individual people are more effective than organizational accounts on LinkedIn, and creating a network takes time.
- ▶ **Snapchat.** The youngest audience lives on Snapchat, and like Instagram, everything is visual. As with Instagram, followers are not going to leave Snapchat to visit your website or read something you’ve posted, but it can be an effective place to engage younger volunteers around an issue or event.
 - ▶ **Snapchat Filters.** These are personally designed frames or images that can be made available to followers in a particular area during a certain timeframe. Followers can share images of themselves with the filter at an event to help spread awareness.
- ▶ **Medium (and similar online publications).** Named for posts of “medium” length, Medium is a social network where you can post longer thought pieces, blogs and stories. While tricky to build an audience, Medium is a great tool if you have blog posts or longer written pieces that you want to share without having to submit an op-ed or blog to other outlet.
 - ▶ **Medium Publications.** A branded collection of posts that you manage, similar to an online magazine. You can pull together posts on a specific topic from various contributors to share with your audience.
- ▶ **Email Marketing.** One of the best ways to share information directly with an engaged network, email marketing is a crucial component of digital strategy. Provide opportunities across other platforms for people to sign up for email updates about the issue and your campaign. Think about the emails you receive that are good, keep them direct, compelling and useful, and make sure to only include one ask in each email. More information is available here: <https://procurement.voicesforhealthykids.org/build-a-campaign/mobilize/action-alerts/>.

Best Practices

- ▶ **Social is pay to play.** Ads are (almost) necessary. Without putting money behind posts, you are unlikely to reach a big audience, particularly on Facebook. The amount you spend and how you spend it depends largely on your resources and goals. It’s important that you have a presence on social channels, but be sure to think through how you can maximize your effect on social with boosted posts and ads even if you don’t have a lot to spend.
- ▶ **Be intentional with content and voice.** Why does your account exist, and what value is it adding to your audience? The content you post should point back to this strategic basis. What are you sharing? What action do you want users to take? What type of post is going to achieve that?
- ▶ **One ask in posts.** Be concise and only include one call to action in a post. Focus on one action you want your followers to take.

- ▶ **Take advantage of current events.** Social platforms can be useful in staying up to date on information and news. This means followers and users are looking for the latest updates. Be nimble and jump at opportunities that arise to comment on current events or provide news on an issue.
- ▶ **Engage with people who interact with you.** Ultimately, one of the best ways to build an audience on social is to engage with people. Decide how your campaign wants to engage and be a part of (and initiate) conversations, which by definition involve give and take.
- ▶ **Foster your followers.** Like their comments or Instagrams. Retweet/favorite their tweets. Engage so they feel like part of a movement you're building together.
- ▶ **Organizing on social media is the same as any other kind of organizing.** This means having a series of conversations about policies and initiatives that you think people should be interested in (and acting on). It also means listening (as well as posting), and modifying content based on what you hear.
- ▶ **Use images and videos, but not if they are confusing or blurry.** A rule across all social platforms: video and visual content perform better. Dynamic images and engaging, short videos catch users' attention. Just don't post low quality or confusing images. Make sure any visual content you post is clear and reflects well on your organization, just as you would with written content.
- ▶ **Be prepared to bring great content (and potentially resources) to the table.** Be choosy about what you post and share. Demonstrate your consideration for your audiences' time and attention by only posting compelling, timely materials (thought-provoking/funny/motivational/urgent/a combination).
- ▶ **Everything can't be urgent.** Mix up your content — if all you post are calls to action, your audience (and platform algorithms, in some cases) will tune you out. A feed with different types of content and different messages is more interesting and engaging. A motivational quote and landscape photo are OK!
- ▶ **Don't be afraid to show the trolls out.** If something's negative, work directly with your communications colleagues on the best way to approach it. Look into having a comment policy.

Digital Ideas:

- ▶ **Introduce themed content buckets.** “Photo the Day” or “#TBT (Throwback Thursday)” can be great ways to mix up the content you are posting and give your audience something to expect on a regular basis.
- ▶ **Organize a day of action.** Enlist allied groups and stakeholders to join you on a specific day with a coordinated hashtag and, if possible, a Twitter chat to increase the likelihood your issue “trends.”
- ▶ **Asking followers to engage with a target.** This is most applicable to Twitter. If the target is an elected official, be sure that advocates identify themselves as constituents. This can also be incorporated into a day of action.

RESOURCES

Links to existing VHK content

- ▶ [Tips for writing action alerts](#)
 - ▶ [Template for action alert](#)
- ▶ [Tips for writing op-eds](#)
 - ▶ [Template of op-ed](#)
- ▶ [Social media tips](#)
 - ▶ [Social media samples](#)
- ▶ [Tips for hosting a media event](#)
- ▶ [Media training tips](#)
- ▶ [Tips for meeting with legislators](#)
- ▶ [Messaging one-pagers](#)
- ▶ [Toolkit landing page](#)
- ▶ [Fast Facts](#)

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