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Section 1: Overview

Being able to communicate your message is key in political social work. Here we focus on best practices of persuasive political communication, including tailoring messages and communications to your audience. This chapter includes overall communication skills, such as framing, strategic use of language, and importance of being clear about your “ask”—what you want your target to do, support, or learn. Traditional media topics include definitions and benefits of various types of media, news hooks, selecting faces and visuals for a campaign, creating soundbites, and key terms such as on the record, off the record, and on background. Social media topics include the variety of available social media platforms and audiences, benefits, drawbacks, and communication strategies for each, as well as ways to keep abreast of emerging social media platforms and abilities. Interpersonal communication topics include public speaking, effective writing, and legislative testimony. Readers will develop a message, create media messaging, and practice “staying on message” as a candidate.

Developing Social Work Competency

The Council on Social Work Education establishes educational standards for all social work programs in the USA. Content in this chapter supports building competency in the following areas that are considered core to the practice of social work:

COMPETENCY 1: Demonstrate Ethical and Professional Behavior

COMPETENCY 5: Engage in Policy Practice

COMPETENCY 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

COMPETENCY 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

COMPETENCY 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Domains of Political Social Work

1. Engaging individuals and communities in political processes	◀
2. Influencing policy agendas and decision-making	◀
3. Holding professional and political positions	◀
4. Engaging with electoral campaigns	◀
5. Seeking and holding elected office	◀

Section 2: Communication

Effective and strategic use of communication is essential to political social work practice. Each of the tactics you identify as part of your strategic planning requires clear communication with your target and/or the public about your goals. If we do not communicate clearly, we run the risk that targets will find themselves frustrated and will lose interest in what we are saying. Our arguments, when not communicated clearly, may hinder our ability to persuade our targets to support our campaign goals. Worse, our targets (the individuals whose support we are seeking) will misunderstand what we are asking for. The last thing we want is to put our heart, soul, and resources into a political strategy, and then to not achieve our goals because of poor communication. To avoid this, and to strengthen your ability to effectively communicate, this chapter begins by walking you through five essential components for crafting any political communication: professional use of self, assessing your target, framing and messaging, use of language, and clarity.

Professional Use of Self

In social work practice, we often talk about **professional use of self**—the idea that we, as individual social workers, are an essential component of our practice interventions with clients. This is an important part of both direct practice and political social work practice. The effectiveness of your social work intervention (whether via an advocacy campaign, an electoral campaign, or a voter engagement effort) is impacted substantially by your own use of self.

As a political candidate or an elected official, you are the face of your campaign or office. As a campaign staffer or as a political staffer, how you communicate and present yourself is perceived as a reflection of the candidate or elected official for whom you work. As an advocate, your communications often are interpreted to reflect positively or negatively on the broader issue for which you are advocating.

This may seem like a lot of pressure on you—and it certainly can be—but it also provides a great opportunity to apply the social work skills that you have learned elsewhere in your social work program to your political social work practice. Some crucial skills are active listening, engaging diversity, deliberate attention to verbal and nonverbal communications, and self-awareness (Cournoyer 2008). Ability to understand and work within ethical values such as integrity and competence is also key (National Association of Social Workers 2017). Some critical considerations to keep in mind as you prepare your political communications are outlined below.

Know your personal comfort level, style, and strengths: Reflect upon and self-assess your communication strengths and weaknesses. For example, if writing is not your strong suit, have you identified a colleague who can review your written communications before you send them out to your target(s)? If public speaking makes you nervous, have you built in time to practice your testimony or to sign up for a program to help you strengthen your public speaking, like Toastmasters? If humor has always been an effective tool for you, have you thought about an appropriate way to incorporate it into your verbal communications?

Know your assumptions: We each bring assumptions to the various policy issues with which we work. Being able to differentiate between our personal opinions and assumptions and objective fact can be difficult. However, knowing this distinction can help us more effectively communicate with targets who do not share the same assumptions as we do (Lavine 2002). We have previously discussed the power of bias and stereotypes. Be aware of your own biases and actively resist the use of stereotypes. Often, we seek to persuade policy decision-makers or constituents who do not share our core assumptions and values. Being able to acknowledge what specific differences exist can help us to more effectively craft communications that reach out to these targets.

Establish credibility: **Credibility**, being considered worthy of trust, is critical in political settings where many motivations guide players' actions. Your targets need to know why to listen to your arguments. They want to have confidence in the information you provide, as well as your ability to back up your words with action (Center for Community Change 1997). In local and state political settings, especially, where elected officials tend to have limited staff resources, they depend heavily on the work of lobbyists, advocates, and other allies, but don't want to be caught in a position where they have trusted the wrong information sources. Credibility comes from professional or personal experience, expertise, and from being someone who consistently provides reliable information when asked.

Be authentic: Just as authenticity is important to direct social work practice with clients, it is important in a political setting. While the public often perceives politicians to be less than sincere, sincerity is a political asset. For candidates, voters, volunteers, and donors like to feel that they can trust what they hear you say. For advocates and staffers, being trustworthy—closely tied to our core social work value of integrity—helps you to be taken more seriously.

Be prepared: In political social work practice, we regularly make claims about a wide range of policy issues. Make sure that you have done your research, as you are responsible for all of the claims you make and the data you provide. For example, do your research so that you can avoid over-generalizations about populations. To say “everyone” will lose benefits under this bill is to open the door to an opponent bringing forward someone who will not, thus undercutting the credibility of your argument. When you are unable to be fully prepared, bring together your credibility and authenticity. As with many social work situations, if you do not know the answer to a question, avoid making up an answer. Instead, be honest and say, “I don't know the answer, but I will find out and get back to you” (and then do so).

Engage thoughtfully with political diversity and difference: The social work profession has been criticized for how well it prepares students to engage with diverse political viewpoints (Hodge 2004). Yet achieving our political social work goals often requires us to engage with, and perhaps partner with, those who differ with us significantly in political ideology. As you work with targets, coalition members, or community members who have strong opposing views from you, think about:

- How can you approach difference with empathy?
- Where can you find common ground with those who are different?
- If someone expresses anger toward you during a political discussion, is that aimed at you, or might there be other context for this emotion?

- Can you and those whose beliefs differ from yours move beyond hyperbole to authentically discuss concerns, fears, and goals?

Often, maintaining a respectful demeanor toward your targets, even when you disagree with their ideology or viewpoints, can help you effectively communicate your argument to decision-makers and constituents. The common phrase “politics makes strange bedfellows” truly is an accurate description of the dynamics you will encounter in your political work. As has been discussed, the individual you are working against today may be your ally on a different policy issue tomorrow. However they get to the same place as you, engaging and building relationships with those holding diverse ideologies, when it is safe for you, will often be key to working together toward your long-term goals.

We want to underscore that this does not mean that you are required to be respectful to people who direct hate toward you or your community. It is not realistic to expect you to be respectful toward people who are actively objectionable toward you, or even to engage with them at all.

Assessing Your Target

Effective political communications rely on assessing your target; that is, having a strong sense of who your target(s) is and the types of factors that shape the decisions your target(s) makes. We have discussed previously how to identify and get to know what factors impact your target(s). Here we focus on how we can use this information to help communicate with targets.

As Lavine (2002) points out in his “Cardinal Rule 1” of advocacy, a primary consideration is whether our argument is tailored to our specific target(s). Go back to the strategic plan you have developed. The target(s) you have identified in that plan should be the person/people to whom your argument is tailored. For example, if you are trying to persuade Rep. Juliana Jones, a staunch supporter of tight fiscal spending caps, that she should support a bill to increase state spending on mental health services, then your testimony/letter/phone call should steer away from arguments about why it is socially just to expand mental health funding. Instead, a fiscally based argument showing how increasing spending on mental health services in other states led to a reduction in other costs to those states might be more effective.

One of the authors’ favorite quotes from marketing is the following: “If you want to sell to fish, don’t use skywriting.” At its essence, this quote means that it does not matter how good your argument may be; if it is made to a target that will not find this argument persuasive, it is ineffective. If fish cannot see the beautiful argument you have written in the air, the skywriting argument will not work. This is part of why it is so important to personalize your target(s) in advocacy campaigns. Because of their personal orientations, each target may require somewhat different arguments and communication techniques.

Using your assessment of your target, try to put yourself in their shoes and understand what factors affect your target’s decision-making. Some specific factors to consider before developing your communications include the following:

- *What sways your target:* Political affiliation and allegiances? Religious affiliation? Specific values? How peers view the target? How the public views your target?
- *Why might your target hold specific attitudes toward your proposed policy solution or your candidacy:* Personal history and experiences? Professional experiences? Values or ideological beliefs? Personality?
- *Are there constraints through which your target views policy choices or candidacies:* Do they perceive an environment conducive to change, do they feel more comfortable with the status quo, or are they most comfortable just making things a little less bad? Do the elected officials you are targeting perceive a climate with limited resources, where their choice is between funding your solution or another, not both?
- *Are there larger news issues, trends, and public concerns that are likely to impact how your target hears your arguments?* Has there been a recent tragedy or episode of violence in your community? Has a natural disaster in your community or elsewhere made news and impacted people's perceptions? Have there been recent public debates, arguments, or protests about related policy issues that may impact your target's perceptions of the issue?

Once you have fully assessed the factors that affect your target's decision-making, you will find yourself more equipped to tailor your argument to the target. An important starting point in communicating with your target is to seek to establish common ground with them, even when it feels like you are coming from very different ideological and value bases (Lens 2005). You can do this by identifying areas of agreement, however small, and addressing these up front before you move to making your case for your candidate or policy proposal. Is there some value that you share that is relevant to this issue? Might this solution offer a way to bridge your ideological divide? For example, "I know we both care deeply about the well-being of children in this state"

Your assessment of your target also should guide you in determining the kinds of evidence that are best suited both to your goals and that your target will most likely find persuasive (Lens 2005). Does your target respond best to financial data? To empirical data? To vivid first-person examples? To anecdotes that show impact on populations near and dear to the target's heart?

Use of Language

In political communications, "knowing how to say something can be as important as the content" (Lens 2005). The language that we use can vastly impact the reception our messages get and, therefore, our ability to elicit policy change.

Professionalism is essential in how we use language in political communications. As Cournoyer (2008) describes in discussing essential communication skills for all social workers:

In written communications, adopt a professional attitude consistent with the qualities and characteristics of professionalism Badly written, poorly formatted documents that contain spelling and grammatical errors, logical fallacies, and fail to reflect critical thought, a scholarly perspective, or the universal intellectual standards are likely to be dismissed by recipients.

These same concepts apply to political communications. Spelling and grammatical errors and poorly articulated or disorganized arguments can make it difficult for your target(s) to take your argument seriously, no matter how valid it may be.

Our verbal and written political communications should use widely **accessible language**, appropriate to our target's vocabulary and experiences. Jargon, acronyms, and terms used by insiders should be avoided. Sometimes we are so familiar with our areas of practice and expertise that we do not realize the extent to which we use jargon in our communications. However, to persuade someone who is not as familiar with this language, we need to use language that they will understand. This also applies to presenting data. Where possible, use simple charts and graphs to present numbers and statistics.

Avoid **universal claims** in your language. As discussed previously, there is always an exception that can make your argument vulnerable. For example, instead of "all" or "everyone," consider using less assailable words like "most," "many," or "some," or, where possible, use specific numbers or percentages.

Be succinct and brief with your communications. Targets of political communication are often bombarded with messages from a variety of sources, and have limited time to hear, read, and process these communications. Spend substantial time reviewing your verbal and written communications to make them as succinct and brief as possible. Lens (2005) cites the famous writer George Orwell to advise social work advocates, "If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out" (p. 236). This is relevant for any public communications, but particularly so for those that involve the media. Developing and stating quotable **soundbites**, a short, self-contained version of your message, is critical for garnering media coverage that promotes your message.

Pay careful attention to word choice. Sometimes, we jump quickly into the words that we use, without attention to how those words may be interpreted by others. In political communications, however, how others may interpret our words is of utmost importance. As Lens (2005) notes, a small wording change can lead to vastly different perceptions of the issue. For example, if we call the tax that some individuals' descendants pay on their property an "estate tax," the public visualizes wealthy families passing on an estate to their families, garnering public support for the tax. On the other hand, if we call the same tax a "death tax," the public visualizes people being taxed upon their family member's death, leading to public opposition for the tax. Same tax, different public reactions. Another very public example is the use of the term "Obamacare" rather than the "Affordable Care Act" to refer to the health-care reform instituted under President Obama. Polls as of 2017 consistently showed broad support for the Affordable Care Act and substantial opposition to Obamacare,

despite the fact that these two terms refer to exactly the same thing (Dropp and Nyhan 2017)!

A final consideration in using language in political communications is *awareness of the tone that you use*. The **tone**, including the sound, pitch, and speed of one's voice, that a speaker uses can communicate its own set of messages. Where possible, be attuned to the tone that you are using. Try to stay positive and avoid argumentation. Focus on where you may be coming across arrogantly and try to avoid this. Passion is often appropriate, but where possible, try to adopt a tone that may appear reasonable and nonthreatening. Often, you may not be aware of how your tone comes across. Watching videos of your verbal communications and identifying colleagues who will give you honest feedback can help you to become more aware of your tone and to moderate it as needed.

Issues of power and privilege are relevant to this discussion. As we talk about messaging, it is critical that we acknowledge that culture, race, gender, political ideology, and other aspects of identity—yours and that of your audience—impact how your tone and message are received. A common theme that emerges in blog posts written by social work students interning at the Texas Legislature is that messages with similar tones are received differently in that environment, depending on who is communicating the message (University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work n.d.). For example, one student described how emotionally laden speeches by female, Democratic members of the House of Representatives were received more negatively than a similarly emotional speech by a white male Republican member. Self-reflection on the extent to which you are personally comfortable working within the framework of implicit, and sometimes explicit, biases in the political arena is part of your own development as a political social worker. When you are the one in a position of power, be mindful of the stereotypes that you hold and how they affect your responses to others. Just as you would in direct practice, acknowledge your own implicit bias and do the work to treat others fairly.

Clarity

As you craft political communications, make sure not to lose sight of your purpose, and make sure that anyone who reads, sees, or hears your communications will know exactly what the purpose is. In all of your communications, it is essential that your target(s) knows exactly why you are communicating with them, and exactly what you want them to do as a result of the communication. Often it takes many exposures to your message before it registers with your target, which explains why you hear the same message from political campaigns over and over (and over and over).

Do not overload your communications. Limit them to two or three main points, so that your message remains clear. A common structure for political communications, regardless of format, is a clear beginning that summarizes your argument; a middle that builds the case for your solution and where possible heads off major objections; and an end that summarizes your argument and explicitly states what

you want your target to do (**your “ask”**). This will be described in more detail and applied to various forms of political communications in Sect. 4.

Framing and Messaging

Framing is a common term in political communications, referring to how we present an issue to our audience and how it is portrayed (Wallack et al. 1999). Candidates, elected officials and their staff, advocates and lobbyists, and the media use framing to shape how audiences think about an issue.

In our own political framing—whether of our advocacy solution or our candidate—we are trying to control messaging and lay the groundwork for successfully achieving our goals. Framing starts with identifying a very clear **message**—what is the important point or theme that we want to communicate about our advocacy solution or our candidate? Once we identify this message, we need to test with colleagues, allies, or constituents whether this message is truly clear, understandable, and relevant to the general public.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Developing a Message

In Chap. 6, you developed an advocacy campaign around a specific policy change. Who is the target of this campaign? What do you want to communicate to that target?

Imagine you have 30 seconds in an elevator with that person (say, at a visit to the state capitol or a chance encounter at a professional meeting). What would you say in that 30 seconds? Be as specific and clear as possible. Test this message out with a colleague or friend. What resonates with your friend, what does not? What might you change to strengthen your message?

Crafting a Candidate Message: A Message Box Exercise

In an electoral campaign, the campaign message is as important for what it is not as what it is. It is not the candidate’s biography, all of the things they will do when elected, or the details of all the issues they care about. It is a short concise statement, aimed at a specific audience that captures what you want those who will vote to know about you.

A tool commonly used in developing electoral campaign messages is the **message box exercise** (personal communication, Kate Coyne-McCoy, March 3, 2017). It requires your campaign to seriously and honestly reflect upon and outline four distinct categories of information:

1. “Us on Us”: the positive things you will say about your candidate
2. “Them on Them”: the positive things your opponent will say about himself/herself

3. “Us on Them”: the negative things you *might* be able to say about your opponent (even if you will not necessarily say them directly)
4. “Them on Us”: the negative things they *might* say about your candidate

Much of the information necessary to complete this exercise builds off the assessments of the candidate and opponent’s strengths and weaknesses. This exercise could also be adapted for an issue campaign or an advocacy campaign.

Below, we provide an example of what a message box exercise might look like for a hypothetical election race between early social workers Jane Addams and Mary Richmond. The sample message box is what one might look like if developed by the Addams campaign (information from Franklin 1986).

<p>Us on Us: <i>What Jane Addams says about herself</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founder of successful Settlement House • Reformer • Listens to the community • Focuses on people’s experiences • Intellectual • Skilled writer • Work informed by theories • First woman president of National Conference of Charities & Corrections • First woman to receive an honorary degree from Yale University • Nationally visible • Supported women’s right to vote, workers’ rights, child labor laws, and laws to improve housing conditions • Seconded Theodore Roosevelt’s presidential nomination for the Progressive Party • Leader in anti-war efforts; won a Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts 	<p>Them on Them: <i>What Mary Richmond says about herself</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader of successful Charity Organization Society • Innovator • Scientific • Efficient • Professional • Worked her way up from entry level with only a high school diploma through hard work • Practical • Work is natural and effective • Headed the Russell Sage Foundation, which gave nearly \$5.8 million in grants over 24 years • Supported services to soldiers, sailors, and their families • Supports the development of evidence-based techniques for work with individuals • Wrote the first social work textbook
<p>Us on Them: <i>What Jane Addams says about Mary Richmond</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ignores context • Too hard on the poor • Cold and indifferent • Doesn’t understand social sciences • Lacks education • Opposes minimum wage, workers’ rights, labor laws, and worker safety • Pro-war • Doesn’t believe in client confidentiality • Doesn’t use theory • No experience in politics • Blames the poor for their problems • Not known outside of social work 	<p>Them on Us: <i>What Mary Richmond says about Jane Addams</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too soft on the poor • Old fashioned • Doing more harm than good by telling people that the system is the problem • Doesn’t understand “real” science • Grew up with a silver spoon in her mouth • Environmental reform work is a distraction from the “real” work of social work (casework) • Too partisan • Opposes social work becoming more professional • Never received an honorary degree from a school of social work

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Create a Campaign Message

Based on the message box above, create a campaign message for either Jane Addams or Mary Richmond in a fictional campaign for presidency of the National Council of Charities and Corrections (now the National Association of Social Workers). Share your message with colleagues, friends, or other social workers. What was effective?

For candidates, two common challenges emerge in creating your own message. First, being authentically yourself can be a challenge when creating a message that is also trying to accomplish a specific goal. Take a moment to watch the campaign ads of politicians you think of as being authentic. What about their message feels authentic to you?

Second, for candidates who differ from the “typical politician,” implicit bias that others might hold can impact how your message is heard. For example, a social worker working in a political field was once told that “all social workers are socialists.” If you have young children, particularly if you are a woman, people may question why you are campaigning instead of parenting your children. If you are a person of color, people might implicitly question whether you have the authority needed to hold office. It is challenging—but important, nonetheless—to consider whether and how your message should address or seek to diffuse these perceptions. The issues of power and privilege discussed earlier are especially relevant here.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Create a Campaign Message for Yourself

Using this message box, create a campaign message for your own campaign for an office of your choice (maybe President of NASW, President of the USA, or President of the Student Association) against an imaginary opponent. Share your messages with colleagues, friends, or other social workers. What was effective?

<p>Us on Us: <i>What you say about yourself</i></p>	<p>Them on Them: <i>What your opponent says about themselves</i></p>
<p>Us on Them: <i>What you say about your opponent</i></p>	<p>Them on Us: <i>What your opponent says about you</i></p>

Staying on Message

Once our message is established, we **stay on message**, repeatedly emphasizing this message in our communications. We want to see consistent messaging by our whole team, whether the staff of an organization, a coalition, or a political campaign. Create boiler-plate language that enables your message to be repeated clearly, consistently, and frequently. Work together to develop buy-in among anyone who might be called on as a spokesperson.

Framing is often helped by compelling visuals, symbols, and even social media memes, used to reinforce the message (Wallack et al. 1999). For example, METUP, a group that advocates for research to save the lives of the 522,000 people who die of metastatic breast cancer every year conducts “die-ins” where the visual is 113 people lying on the ground, to represent the 113 people who die per day from this disease (Schattner 2015). Another way to frame an issue is to personalize it, by selecting a person to be the “**face**” of the policy problem. In an electoral campaign, the “face” is typically the candidate. In an advocacy campaign, however, the “face” is carefully selected to paint a clear picture of the impacts of your policy problem or proposed policy change. Much care must go into picking the face for your message. In an interview with Claudette Colvin, included in the Resource section, she discusses why Rosa Parks was chosen to be the face of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, even though Claudette Colvin herself had been arrested for refusing to move off the bus 9 months before Rosa Parks.

It is common practice to pick and train (e.g., through role plays) the person who will represent your message so that they do not steer your message off-track. Some excellent examples of this are in the radio episode *Imperfect Plaintiffs* linked in the Resource section. Where possible, an authentic, unshakeable “face” of the message, who can speak genuinely, from direct experience with the problem, can evoke an emotional connection from your audience. At the same time, as social workers, we need to seriously consider our profession’s ethical standards in making this decision (National Association of Social Workers 2017). For example, is the individual fully aware of the risks and benefits of being a public representative of your policy problem/solution (informed consent)? Has this individual truly made their own decision to serve in this role (self-determination)?

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Selecting Faces

Identify a recent advocacy campaign that you have observed, either in your local community or covered in the media. Consider the following questions on your own or with a friend: Was there a “face” of this message? Who was the “face” of this message? How well did this “face” communicate the message? What challenges, if any, did this “face” seem to experience as part of the advocacy campaign?

POLITICAL SOCIAL WORKER PROFILE: Stephanie Mace, MSW, MPP
Senior Director of Public Policy, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas (Fig. 9.1).

Fig. 9.1 Stephanie Mace,
MSW, MPP



On the first day of my MSW internship at the Texas Capitol, my new boss walked me and my new colleagues around the Capitol to give us the history of the building and an overview of the legislative process. The elevator stopped and a gentleman got on. He was maybe in his 50s, wearing jeans and a white polo with a beer logo on it. When the gentleman got off, my boss whispered, “That man is a legislator ... Representative” so-and-so. That brief encounter debunked my preconceived notion that elected officials were superior to me. It made me realize that they are regular, normal people too. Also, it taught me to never gossip at the Capitol because you never know who’s around.

You use the same principles for making a case to an elected official as you would to a parent, professor, spouse, or boss. Be honest with the elected official, and make sure to say why there would be opposition to your issue. Provide reasonable remedies or policy solutions to your problem. Also, putting a face to an issue by sharing a client’s story is powerful.

In advance of a meeting with an elected official, determine what would make it a successful meeting and then develop your talking points. Make sure that everyone in the meeting has the opportunity to speak and provides a different perspective on the issue. Do not inundate the legislator with information—either orally or in your handouts. A one-pager (front and back) on the issue is an ideal amount. Remember that changing a policy usually takes multiple years, so building a working relationship is more important than one vote. Take time to build rapport with the official and their staff, thank them for their hard work, and try to have fun.

Section 3: Working with Traditional and Social Media

While many political communications are focused directly on your target(s), relying on media platforms to garner public support is a critical part of political strategy. A guest speaker in one of the authors’ courses once described the media both as a campaign’s “best friend and worst enemy.” This quote underscores the challenges

that political social workers can face when seeking attention through traditional and/or social media.

In an electoral campaign, media coverage can help a candidate get on the map and build name recognition. In an advocacy campaign, media coverage can help advocates gain public support for their policy goals. It can create the impression of widespread public support for these goals, and/or show decision-makers that they will be able to get media attention for their efforts if they choose to engage with the advocates. At the same time, negative media attention can harm our campaigns. Media often will cover a negative story about a candidate or about someone affiliated with an advocacy campaign. If you publicize that 500 people will show up for a rally in front of your Congressional representative's office, and instead 50 show up, you might pick up your phone only to find a mocking Tweet, accompanied by a picture of your sparse attendance. If your candidate loses his or her cool during a campaign event, a video of this slip-up may be shared widely on social media, ultimately becoming front-page news.

An early example of how the twenty-first-century media climate caught a candidate in its crosshairs involved former Virginia Governor and then-Senator George Allen. In the middle of a 2006 campaign event, Allen pointed to a young volunteer videographer in the crowd of Indian descent, who was working for his opponent, and said, "This fellow here, over here with the yellow shirt, Macaca, or whatever his name is. He's with my opponent. He's following us around here. And it's just great" (Craig and Shear 2006). Video of this incident and commentary about his use of what was widely seen as a derogatory term spread quickly through traditional media and across political blogs. Three months later, the incumbent Allen lost his reelection race.

In this section, we discuss how political social workers can work with traditional and social media outlets to increase the likelihood of positive coverage for your campaigns.

Types of Traditional Media

Traditional media primarily refers primarily to print (newspapers and newsmagazines) and broadcast media (radio and television). While print journalism may not have the same influence that it once had, print and broadcast media and the journalists who investigate and report news through these outlets retain substantial political influence.

Traditional media maintains an extensive footprint. In the Houston, Texas, area, for example, as of 2011, there was one major nationally known daily English-language newspaper. In addition, there were 114 other daily, weekly, and monthly newspapers and 106 magazines, often targeted to various economic, ethnic, racial, or religious subgroups. The metropolitan area also was home to 19 television stations and 58 radio stations. Figure 9.2 displays some of the diversity you might find within traditional media sources.

A wide variety of traditional media outlets offer political social workers many choices for communicating their political messages. To determine where to go to try to gain media coverage, start with identifying the media outlets in your town, city,



Fig. 9.2 Example of the diversity of traditional media outlets in Houston, Texas

county, or state. Where possible, seek out access to a local media distribution list. Start to develop a list of media contacts, with media outlets, reporters who cover politics and your substantive policy area, and contact information.

Types of Social Media

Social media has arisen in the twenty-first century as both a major media force and a major political force. **Social media** refers to websites and applications (“apps”) that allow users to share content and interact without meeting in person. It includes platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, and Snapchat, as well as blogs and listservs. While these platforms are all open to the broad general public, like traditional media outlets, they tend to reach different populations. In 2016, 68% of US adults used Facebook, as opposed to the 28% of US adults who used Instagram and the 21% who used Twitter (Greenwood et al. 2016). Some platforms are better than others at reaching various population subgroups. Facebook is popular among adults of all ages, all educational backgrounds, all geographic areas, and all income levels. In contrast, Instagram is most commonly used by Millennials, while Pinterest is most popular among women (Greenwood et al. 2016).

Many traditional media journalists extensively use and share their journalism through social media, opening up access to news stories to readers who might not

otherwise subscribe to their newspapers or watch their news shows and blurring the distinction between the two types of media. At the same time, social media also provides a fairly inexpensive, decentralized space for any individual or group to carefully craft and share political messages without the filter of traditional media. “For advocacy nonprofits in particular, social media sites provide a way to expand advocacy efforts by reaching new networks of community actors and by mobilizing those networks to take action” (Guo and Saxton 2012).

Social media offers an opportunity for “two-way communication (advocate to public and public to advocate)” (Hoefler 2016); the same applies for campaigns. This two-way communication offers a great opportunity for you to engage and mobilize supporters around your campaign, but it also offers challenges. As Scott and Maryman (2016) note, “quality campaigns require concerted time and thoughtful consideration” (p. 12). Quality use of social media as part of a political communication strategy requires resources to maintain a regular flow of posts. Comments, replies, retweets, etc. need to be monitored to ensure that what started out as a positive message for your campaign does not turn into a negative message as a public conversation ensues. Recently, social media sites have become a hub for “fake news,” material reported in a news outlet that is false. This requires electoral and advocacy campaigns to monitor social media to ensure that they do not become a target for incorrect stories, and to integrate a rapid response system allowing a campaign to respond quickly to problematic postings.

Resource considerations have been identified as barriers for social work organizations to engage in Web-based advocacy. However, recent tools make it easier to facilitate and monitor crucial engagement with the public around this work (Edwards and Hoefler 2010).

Media Strategy

Planning a media strategy begins by assessing whether and how your campaign or area of policy is currently being covered. Questions to explore include the following:

1. Is the campaign or policy issue currently being covered in traditional or social media? If so, by which outlets? Do you want to see a shift in which outlets are covering it?
2. How is it being covered? Do you want to see a shift in the framing or direction of the coverage?
3. Who are the journalists reporting on this issue?
4. Who are presented as key spokespeople in relation to the campaign or policy issue? Do they reflect your candidate or proposed policy solution?
5. Are there facts or perspectives missing from current coverage that would strengthen support for your candidate or stance?

As you prepare to engage with traditional media journalists, make sure that you are familiar with rules and expectations that govern interactions with journalists. Your advocacy or electoral campaign should have a spokesperson(s) specifically designated to speak on its behalf to the media. The spokesperson should be someone

who speaks articulately and carefully, can think on their feet, is able to establish positive relationships with journalists, and is fully knowledgeable about your campaign (Whitman 2011).

Before social workers engage with journalists, it is critical to understand the categories of information a source can provide to a reporter. Below are the specific definitions used by the Associated Press (n.d.) to describe how a journalist is expected to handle information and materials provided by a source:

On the record	The information can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.
Off the record	The information cannot be used for publication.
Background	The information can be published but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, the sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position.
Deep background	The information can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

To protect yourself and your organization, do not agree to make an “off-the-record” statement to a journalist. While using this designation may keep your statement from being directly quoted on air or in a publication, it does not forbid journalists from using this information to try to gather information from another source. Moreover, as Whitman (2011) advises,

Assume that anything you say will turn up in a media report, probably with your name attached to it. Don't say anything to the media unless you're willing to see it made public. All politicians know this, and you should, too.

In summary, whether on or off the record, be careful only to tell journalists information you are comfortable having widely known in the public sphere.

In engaging with journalists, know that laws vary by state as to whether journalists (or you) can record phone calls without the other party's consent. In 38 states and the District of Columbia, journalists and other individuals can record conversations of which they are part, without the consent of any other party (Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press 2012). In 12 states, all parties to the conversation must consent to recording. Look into the laws in your state before speaking with journalists, and be prepared with an answer if you are asked for recording permission.

As you develop your media strategy, consider how frequently you will seek coverage. Traditional media coverage rarely results from a single effort to gain media attention. Relying on a single media event or press release can be risky, as the story might not get covered, or might be upstaged by some other event that happens that day. While some campaigns and advocates opt to try to gain a single big media splash, many prefer to try to seek continuous coverage.

Relationship Building

Forming personal working relationships with reporters, bloggers, and others who have access to power in media coverage is an important part of a media strategy (Whitman 2011). Social work's emphasis on the value of human relationships can

help us to develop relationships with reporters who trust and respect us, and who therefore seek us out for information and comments. Strong working relationships with reporters also enable us to have contacts who are likely to be interested when we pitch them a story.

The local media distribution list described earlier in this chapter is an important starting point for identifying with which individual reporters or bloggers to connect. Select media outlets or blogs that reach out to the segment of the public that you are targeting, and then begin to monitor which reporters typically cover political campaigns in this area or the area of policy on which you are focusing. Read and/or watch these media outlets regularly. If your advocacy campaign centers around education policy, for example, who are the reporter(s) who are assigned to the education beat? Are there other reporters at these media outlets who cover related stories in a way that you like, even if they are not assigned to the specific beat?

Once you have identified these reporters, the media spokesperson should reach out to establish personal contact (Whitman 2011). Do not limit this to a quick e-mail or text—this is a good time to have a conversation by phone or even over coffee. This relationship should be nurtured, even when you do not have an immediately newsworthy story to share. There are some good ways to nurture relationships with reporters. For one, share stories that you think the reporter might be interested in related to your issue, even if the stories are not directly related to your advocacy proposal or campaign.

Interpersonal skills are critical in nurturing and maintaining relationships with reporters. Seek to establish a reputation as a go-to person for reporters by being responsive, helpful, trustworthy, and respectful. Make your contact information easily available to interested reporters, and return all contacts quickly, within their deadline. Both print and broadcast media are shaped by deadlines—a missed return contact can mean that a reporter lacks necessary information for a story, or that your perspective is excluded.

Be helpful by answering reporters' questions, verifying their facts, and clarifying your positions as needed. Be honest in your responses; lying to a reporter is a fast way to sever your relationship. Do not promise an answer if you cannot give one, and do not make up responses if you do not know the answer to a reporter's question. Instead, try a response like, "I don't know, but I will find out the answer to that question for you. How quickly do you need an answer?" and then get the answer to the reporter within that time frame. Also be sure to thank reporters when they cover your campaign or advocacy issue positively, rather than limiting your feedback to criticism of negative stories.

As you enter into a media strategy, you are likely thinking about how you can impact media coverage. Reporters, on the other hand, have different motivations that are important to understand as you build relationships with them. Reporters typically serve in a watchdog role, seeking to report important information that impacts the public, but also are motivated by identifying stories that will garner readers and/or viewers (Whitman 2011). When a reporter reaches out to you, ask them questions to assess how they are thinking about the story, e.g., why they called you, where they got your name, and who else have they talked to. This information can help you get a sense of how the story is being shaped, guiding how you respond and who else you encourage them to contact.

BUILD YOUR SKILLS: Answering Reporters' Questions

Strategic communication with reporters around your electoral or advocacy campaign involves predicting and preparing for the challenging questions reporters might ask you. On your own or with a friend, brainstorm three questions a reporter might ask about one of the campaigns you developed earlier in this book. After identifying these three questions, develop a response to each question.

News Hooks

Pitching a story to reporters can be challenging, as they have many competing stories that they can be covering. It is essential, then, to pitch stories in such a way that make them appear compelling and significant. A common way to make stories appear newsworthy and capture reporters' attention is via “**news hooks**” (SPIN Project 2003).

Common news hooks include the following:

- Using *dramatic visuals* that support the campaign's message: Television and social media, in particular, are attracted to captivating visuals. For example, in opposition to Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy regarding sexual orientation policies in the U.S. military, Lt. Dan Choi captured media attention by chaining himself to the fence surrounding the White House (Dan Choi handcuffs himself to White House in Don't Ask, Don't Tell protest 2010).
- Demonstration of *broad, passionate support*: For example, highlighting the 1000 people who came to the steps of City Council to rally in support of your campaign is likely to attract attention.
- Providing a *local angle to a national story* involves tying your electoral platform or advocacy goals to a story that is current garnering national media attention.
- Bringing a *human interest angle* to the story personalizes how real people are impacted by a policy issue. These last two tactics may be combined. For example, after a federal budget proposed cutting 20% of the National Institutes of Health budget, a cancer research center in Seattle held a press conference featuring Beth Caldwell, a 38-year-old Seattle resident with Stage IV cancer who had been treated at that center, putting a very human, local, relatable face on the issue of federal funding for cancer research (video link in Resources).
- A *calendar hook*, in which the story is tied to some sort of anniversary (e.g., 1 year since the campaign kicked off, a decade since the current policy was passed) or time of the year (a relevant holiday, the season, etc.)
- Highlighting *celebrities*, powerful, popular people, who are supporting the campaign: For example, few Americans knew much about the Armenian genocide until Kim Kardashian visited Armenia in 2015 (Puente 2015). You may not have access to a Kardashian, but who are your local celebrities? On campus, they might be alumni who are well known, athletes, and coaches, or those who are known for their performing arts work or roles in student government; in your

town they might include everyone's favorite librarian or a retired teacher who has a lot of influence.

- Highlighting *conflict or controversy* often engages the public, and may be particularly helpful if the campaign is framed as an underdog.
- *Responding to your opposition*, especially when the opposition's actions or statements have received media attention.

In seeking to gain traditional media coverage using your news hooks, strategic attention to timing is necessary. All traditional media sources have **media deadlines**, which they must accommodate, i.e., times when articles must be completed to go to press and deadlines for various television and radio news programs. Highlighting news hooks earlier in the day increases the likelihood that a story might be covered in the evening news or appear in the next day's newspaper. With traditional media, there are also common "news holes," where major news stories are less frequent. "News holes," such as over holidays and on Monday mornings, offer opportunities for advocates to garner coverage for their campaigns. In contrast, political campaigns sometimes use Friday evening "news dumps" as a way to release information that they would prefer get little media or public attention. When working with a media source, your first question should always be "what is your deadline?"

While news hooks are commonly associated with gaining traditional media attention, many of these news hooks also are helpful in garnering attention on social media. Just as with traditional media, relevant and compelling content is more likely to gain attention. News hooks such as dramatic visuals, visual demonstrations of broad passionate support, calendar hooks, and highlighting celebrity support also can help to make your stories compelling in a social media environment.

Social Media Strategies

Ray (2011) recommends starting with a centralized social media strategy. This involves choosing a primary social media platform that will serve as the hub for your political efforts. In selecting this initial platform, think strategically about which platform is most likely to reach your target audience(s) (Hoefler 2016). This may be one of the platforms identified in the section "Types of Social Media" above, or a platform that has newly emerged since publication of this book. Once you or your organization is comfortable with this platform, then you might add other social media platforms to your strategy, but take care to target your use of each social media platform to the audience and communication style of that platform.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Selecting a Social Media Platform

With a partner, discuss the primary audience for your campaign strategy. What might be the most appropriate social media platform to use to reach this audience? Why did you choose this platform? You might find it helpful to look through organizations that are known for their advocacy work to see how they handle social media.

Each platform has different customs and rules. Make sure that you fully understand these before actively engaging with the platform as part of your campaign. In communicating across different platforms, some common themes exist, including the following:

- Be authentic, genuine, and relatable in postings.
- Limit postings that appear solely promotional. Some sources suggest that “your ratio of non-self-interested material to self-interested material should be roughly three to one” (Ray 2011).
- Strive for a combination of information-sharing (more likely to be re-shared, therefore increasing awareness of your campaign), engaging in conversations and dialogue with supporters (which builds relationships and increases collaboration), and calls to action (mobilizing supporters) (Scott and Maryman 2016).
- Communicate messages in an interesting and compelling way; visuals or engaging memes can help with this.
- Share relevant and meaningful postings from allies.
- Use hashtags where appropriate to help support message framing and connect with others who share similar interests.
- On platforms like Twitter where information moves rapidly, repost critical content multiple times to increase the likelihood it reaches a broader audience. Others will understand when you say “ICYMI” (in case you missed it) when sharing information multiple times.
- Credit information that is repeated or shared from other sources. It is the right thing to do, and increases the likelihood that others will share your information as well.

Social media platforms provide campaigns with opportunities to recruit supporters and to build their awareness of the campaign and its goals. However, political social workers “must strive to convert this awareness into actions that support the cause,” moving supporters from clicks and shares to political action that supports the campaign’s goals (Scott and Maryman 2016). Political social workers using social media communications as part of their electoral or advocacy campaign should be intentional in frequently including public calls to action to further the campaign’s goals and to mobilize supporters (Hoefer 2016; Scott and Maryman 2016).

Once you are familiar with your social media platform(s), think strategically about developing a social media plan, including what you will post, how and where you will post it, and a calendar of when you will post (keeping in mind the calendar hooks described previously). For electoral campaigns especially, a rapid response strategy should be incorporated into any media plan, so that you are prepared to quickly respond to your opponent as needed.

Monitor your social media sites using apps that allow you to manage and track multiple accounts, hashtags, and keywords. As of 2017, the most commonly used resources for this are Hootsuite to manage postings and Google Alerts and Klout to

track output metrics and monitor the reach of your postings. As social media platforms and apps change on such a rapid basis, your social media plan must be flexible enough to enable you to adapt your techniques to new technologies that emerge (Ray 2011). As McNutt and Menon (2008) point out, rapid changes in the technology being used for advocacy and activism will continue to open up opportunities for new political change tactics.

Section 4: Strategic Communications

The extensive data and information that you have collected on your candidate or policy solution, along with your core message, serve as the basis for your campaign's strategic political communications. Within a single campaign, you utilize the same information, but the message and evidence are reframed to different audiences, using different formats. In order to make final choices about your choice of tactics and to begin to develop these communications, you will first need to answer three key questions:

1. Who is the audience for the communication?
2. To which communication formats is your specific audience most likely to respond (e.g., one-on-one meetings, policy briefs, action alerts, letters to the editor, testimony, campaign mailings, press releases, media messaging)?
3. Which arguments and evidence will your specific audience find most salient?

Your answers to these questions will help you clarify your audience for each communication and strategically prepare it for that audience. In the section below, we summarize the intended audience, purpose, format, and content of seven commonly used political tactics.

One-on-One Meeting

Audience: In advocacy campaigns, the audience of a one-on-one meeting is typically a policy decision-maker, commonly an elected official or a member of the official's staff. In electoral campaigns, the audience of a one-on-meeting is commonly a donor, a voter, or someone with clout in the community. Given the time constraints of electoral campaigns, one-on-one meetings are limited for candidates but may be held by staff members or other surrogates or proxies.

Purpose: A one-on-one meeting typically seeks to influence a policy decision-maker to help advance your policy goals, or to influence a donor, voter, or powerful individual to support your candidate with money, a vote, or a public statement of support.

Format: In an advocacy campaign you will ideally work with target's scheduler to schedule a substantial amount of time to sit down with your target. Even if your

meeting is scheduled ahead of time, be understanding if the target is late, and do not be surprised if you are interrupted during your meeting. Sometimes, one-on-one meetings happen on the fly or in more informal settings—e.g., an interaction in the elevator, in a restaurant or bar near the Capitol, or at a coffee shop. Prepare ahead of time to make the most of the limited time you are likely to have. Know what your specific ask is before the meeting starts.

During this meeting, be prepared to defend your stance, but avoid directly attacking your target for disagreeing with you. As we've discussed previously, relationships are critical currency in political work—the target you attack today could be the potential ally you need tomorrow. Note also that sometimes targets express disagreement because they, in fact, disagree with you. At other times, targets express a skeptical stance in order to test how strong your argument is, and perhaps to ultimately adopt your argument for their own use in later supporting your stance.

In an electoral campaign, one-on-one meetings often take place when you knock on a potential voter's door. You can prepare to talk about yourself, or your candidate, but you won't know much about the target other than their name, age, and political party. Active listening skills are key here, as your job is to listen and find out how to communicate your message in such a way that it connects with the voter.

Content: One-on-one meetings can be both informative and persuasive. Prepare talking points ahead of time, so that you can keep on point. Start by establishing your credibility up front: As an advocate: who are you, who do you represent, are you a constituent? As a candidate/campaigner: who are you, who is the candidate? Build rapport by thanking your target for meeting with you. Then, simply and directly describe your message or stance and why you hold this stance, providing personal anecdotes and case examples to support your stance where possible. Present a clear, specific request of what you want from your target, and reiterate this at the end of your meeting. "I am asking you to vote to move this bill out of committee" or "I am asking for your vote on November 8" are better than "I hope you will support this cause" or "Maybe you could think about voting for me."

Always leave brief, easily reviewable written materials behind after your meeting. Brief fact sheets, letters from constituents or a newspaper article or editorial supporting your stance are all appropriate materials for an advocacy meeting. A small piece of campaign literature or one-page summary is appropriate for a campaign interaction. Follow up an advocacy meeting or a meeting with a donor with a thank-you note. Include any information you agreed to provide, and a brief summary of the position your target took at this meeting.

Policy Brief

Audience: **Policy briefs** are aimed at policy decision-makers, often elected officials who may have the opportunity to vote on policy recommendations, but may not have time to fully research the policy. On an electoral campaign, policy briefs might be used to help the candidate understand an issue before they attend an event,

interview, or debate, or to help others understand the candidate's policy stances or proposals.

Purpose: Policy briefs are concise written analyses of a policy or policy problem. They are designed to provide an in-depth, but concise, summary of policy research, in order to influence policy decision-makers regarding specific policy change recommendations or inform others about the candidate's stance.

Format: A policy brief is usually a multipage document, concise and designed to be quickly read by policy-makers. It typically includes, at a minimum, an engaging title; research-based analysis of a policy problem; and, emerging from the analysis, concrete policy recommendations to address the policy problem. Policy briefs often use headings, brief sections, and tables, graphs, or charts. The language and layout will depend on the audience and their background in the issue.

Content: Policy briefs are both informative and persuasive, grounded in evidence. Effective policy briefs include a clear take-home message and specific and detailed policy change recommendations or policy summaries.

Action Alert

Audience: Action alerts are aimed at a community or action network that a campaign seeks to mobilize. This might include current or potential grassroots activists or volunteers, voters, or donors.

Purpose: **Action alerts** are used in both electoral and advocacy campaigns in order to inform supporters in a network about a policy solution or candidate and inspire them to action on its behalf. They might provide a quick update or a recent development and ask people to take related action.

Format: An action alert typically takes the form of a one-page document or is incorporated into a brief e-mail. It also can be posted to a website and linked to a social media post. It is concise and designed to be quickly readable by people who are supporters, but who may not act on behalf of the campaign if information about how to do so is not easily accessible. Action alerts present any relevant facts and data necessary to inform the reader about the policy problem or candidate and the action steps that the reader should take to act on this information. Action alerts are designed to instill a sense of urgency to act and to provide clear action steps to readers. Commonly, the action steps are incorporated directly into the alert (click here to donate, call this number to be connected to your representative, etc.).

Content: Action alerts are both informative and persuasive. Effective action alerts include relevant facts and statistics that readers can understand and easily repeat, along with presenting a clear action(s) for readers to take.

POLITICAL SOCIAL WORKER PROFILE: Melanie Pang, MSW
Qualitative Research and Evaluation Manager, The Salvation Army (Fig. 9.3).

Fig. 9.3 Melanie Pang, MSW, by Eric Edward Schell of Pride Portraits



When I graduated with my MSW in 2012, I had no plan, but I did give myself two biased and embarrassing, criteria: (1) Do not work for a faith-based organization because they might fire you for being gay, and (2) do not work with kids because it sounds really difficult and kids do not like you. Thirty job applications, five phone interviews, two in-person interviews, and only one job offer later, my first and only opportunity to use my degree came in the form of a case management position at a Catholic organization working with refugee children in foster care. Not only was this job offer the one I thought I shouldn't take, it actually became the job that helped me the most in growing my understanding of how many systems can touch a single person's life. Humbled, I took the job and found ways to advocate within it.

After this case management experience, I got my first glimpse into working on an issue campaign when the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) was proposed before the Houston, Texas, City Council in 2014. The ordinance would have banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, sex, race, color, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion, disability, pregnancy, genetic information, family, marital, and military status. A lack of understanding of the ordinance's protections, combined with a lack of empathy for the LGBTQ community, specifically the transgender community, among the general population resulted in a crushing loss of the ordinance by referendum, with 60.97% voting against it. I still remember the butterflies in my stomach each time I stepped up to the microphone to speak to City Council, and how I had to shorten my testimony to 1 minute due to the hundreds of speakers who filled City Hall, waiting for their turn to speak truth to power late into the night.

In 2017, I felt the familiar nerves return when I, along with thousands of others, arrived at the Texas Capitol the morning of March 7 at 7:30 a.m. to provide my testimony against Senate Bill 6, a bill that would require transgender people to use bathrooms in public schools, government buildings, and

(continued)

public universities based on “biological sex.” Once the testimonies began, it was clear that there was a large divide between the people testifying and the people elected to represent them. I felt the weight of each story as if it were being told in an intimate space, as if their trauma was being shared for healing beyond advocacy, not being recorded and livestreamed for the world to see (even though it was). Unfortunately, many of the senators on the State Affairs Committee had already made up their minds about the bill, and the only comfort available to us was each other. Watching the gestures of support between those testifying kept me alert for hours.

I testified a little after midnight, and I was only halfway through the list of names signed up to testify. I had rewritten my testimony multiple times throughout the day as I saw committee members unmoved by emotional testimony. I realized that instead, I needed to speak to all of Texas. Deviating from my usual approach of “catching more flies with honey,” my testimony wasn’t persuasive; it was closer to accusatory. It ended with pointed questions like “Why is this cis-gender person’s comfort worth more than a trans person’s life? And how much business will you have to lose before a trans person’s life matters to you?” Despite overwhelming opposition to the bill by those testifying, the bill passed. While those final policies are important, the discourse, the struggle, matters just as much. The contentious discourse in Texas around transgender people’s right to exist in public has created a wave of anti-trans sentiment.

It can feel like our wins are few and far between, but they are always worth fighting for and inspiration is never scarce. Being a queer, Asian-American woman in Texas, I’ve stopped relying on hope as a sole source of motivation, and instead focus on love. Hope makes the work sustainable; love keeps the work a priority. I am privileged enough and have been lucky enough to work for organizations and social justice-minded leaders who support me and believe in the things I advocate for: equity, lived equality, and treating people with dignity.

Testimony to a Legislative Committee, Board, or Agency

Audience: Unlike the communications described thus far, the audience for your testimony (like the testimony Melanie describes) often includes multiple decision-makers (such as an entire legislative committee, county commission, or local school board membership). Testimony is more public than the other communications we have discussed, meaning that you need to also be aware of the possible presence of media and the broader general public who may be in attendance or have access to the testimony via media.

Purpose: **Testimony** is often used as a part of advocacy campaigns, and is designed to persuade policy decision-makers to help advance your policy goals. Testimony also is often designed to influence the larger narrative around your advocacy issue through media coverage. It is important to note that providing testimony—whether in oral or written format—explicitly puts your stance in the public record. You may also incorporate testimony into other communications to show your campaign’s stance on an issue or as an example of your ongoing work.

Format: When we think of providing testimony, we typically think of oral testimony, in which an advocate or community member stands up and speaks before a committee or board. However, we strongly encourage you to prepare and submit written testimony alongside your oral testimony. Among the reasons for this: Sometimes local or state committees have hundreds of people signed up to provide testimony on a particular issue and do not have time to hear everyone. Having written testimony available ensures that you will have the opportunity to get your stance on the record. Above, Melanie describes her experiences when the Texas Senate considered a bill that would require individuals to use the bathroom that matched their birth gender. Over 400 individuals signed up to provide oral testimony on this bill—9 hours in, just 200 of these individuals had spoken (Ura 2017). Preparing written testimony provides a way for those who are unable to testify orally to have their voices heard. It also serves another benefit. It allows you to point legislators to more detailed information while summarizing only your most significant points in your time-limited oral testimony.

Before you testify, it is helpful to reach out to the staffer assigned in charge of the hearing process—this staffer is often called the “clerk” or “secretary.” Ask ahead of time how much time you will have for your testimony, and whether and how you sign up to testify. Time allotted for testimony often varies across federal, state, and local legislative committees. Congressional testimony is typically invited and may be extensive, at the discretion of a Congressional committee. In contrast, state and local governments typically incorporate time-limited opportunities for voluntary, brief public testimony. Invited Congressional testimony is typically limited to 5 minutes. Advocates wanting to speak before a legislative committee in Texas and Connecticut typically are limited to no more than 3 minutes. These time allotments may be further reduced based on the number of people present to provide testimony on a given day, so be prepared to speed up if requested to do so.

Also determine registration processes before the committee hearing begins, as these also differ by state and municipality. In Texas, for example, an advocate wanting to provide oral testimony before a House committee must register to testify in-person using a paperless system on the day of the committee hearing, while an advocate wanting to testify before a Senate committee must do so using a paper card. In Connecticut, the rules vary from one committee to another. In West Virginia, those who testify must be under oath when they testify. In Colorado, the legislature offers remote locations for testimony.

Content: Begin by introducing yourself and briefly establishing your credibility to speak to this issue. Build rapport by thanking the committee and chair for taking the time to hear you. Begin with a clear statement of your stance (i.e., for or against a bill, a budget item, or an amendment) and a clear and succinct message about why you hold this stance. Limit your testimony to no more than 2–3 main points. Use the body of your testimony to sincerely justify your stance and/or counter opposing proposals with data, anecdotes, or a vivid case example. Make sure that you are prepared with a strong finish—a solid closing paragraph that you can jump to if your time is cut. This closing statement should reiterate your main points and express your willingness to provide more information and to answer any questions the committee has.

Be attuned to your style of conversation, making sure that your testimony is clear, to the point, and brief, and that you avoid jargon the community members may not understand. Be prepared for questions; these commonly focus on issues of feasibility, costs, benefits, or impacts of your recommendations. Respond directly and honestly to your questioner, using their name and title if possible, and avoid getting into a public debate with a legislator. Instead, remain poised by acknowledging disagreement and, if appropriate, restating your position. If you do not know an answer to a question, offer to get that information and then do not forget to provide it to the committee after your testimony. Where possible, make yourself available after testimony so that legislators or their staff can follow up on your comments. One of the authors once testified on a bill relating to social work licensure in Connecticut. Many students were there to testify, and she stayed until the end of the hearing to support them. Afterwards, a woman in the audience introduced herself. She was the Commissioner of a major state Department who asked a few questions about licensure and was willing to use her influence with the legislators to help move the bill forward.

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Prepare for, Write, and Deliver Legislative Testimony

Find a committee of your state legislature that considers issues that are of concern to you. Research the process of testimony in front of that committee. How do you sign up to testify? What are the constraints placed on public testimony? Write and practice delivering a 3-minute testimony related to a goal of your advocacy strategy.

Direct Campaign Mailing

Audience: Campaign mailings are often aimed at a targeted subset of constituents that an electoral campaign seeks to mobilize to vote.

Purpose: Campaign mailings are used in electoral campaigns as part of a direct mail strategy, in order to reinforce your campaign message, to educate voters, and to remind and encourage supporters to go to the polls to vote for your candidate. Early in the campaign, your campaign plan should include the development of a

mail strategy that coordinates with the election calendar and major events, and communicates your campaign message coherently.

Format: Your campaign mailing should be easy to read, with visuals, and creatively designed. Mailings designed to educate or encourage voters should assume that recipients will take no more than 3–4 seconds to look at this mailing, so you want to communicate your message clearly and quickly, and in an attractive way, with professional-quality photographs (Wellstone Action [n.d.](#)). Photographs should show your candidate interacting with the public in a genuine way, not canned shots. Pictures of people from the community who support the candidate or issue are also excellent additions. A small number of short headlines are essential for grabbing readers' attention. Keep your mailing easy to read by limiting text, busy graphics, and variations in font size.

Content: Determine ahead of time what you are seeking to accomplish in this mailing: e.g., to introduce your candidate to potential voters, to contrast your candidate with an opponent(s), to deliver a negative message about an opponent, or to encourage the recipient to vote. Even within these different purposes, your campaign may have different messages for different targeted audiences. Clarity of purpose is essential before designing your mailing, so that you can make sure that it communicates a specific and clear message about your candidate to its audience.

Make sure that there is a clear call to action—whether to vote, volunteer, talk to a neighbor, or contribute to the campaign. Make sure also that details about the candidate, the candidates' desired office, what you want the reader to do, when to do it, and contact information for the campaign are clear. Disclaimers required by state and federal election law about who funded and who authorized the mailing must be included to meet all relevant legal mandates.

Press Release

Audience: The audience for a **press release** is typically journalists who are associated with a traditional media source: newspaper or newsmagazine reporters, broadcast journalists or radio and television news producers. Of course, a secondary audience is the public who you hope will ultimately read or view the story you are pushing.

Purpose: Press releases are typically used to persuade media audiences that a particular upcoming event is worthy of their coverage. They also can be used to persuade media that a particular policy issue or candidate is important to cover. Your advocacy or electoral campaign might use a press release to issue a statement or take a stand on an issue appearing in the news, or to provide information to supplement a current story in the news.

In particular, a campaign might use a press release when it has scheduled a newsworthy event to bring attention to the candidate or to the desired policy change. A campaign also might use a press release when it can link the candidate or policy issue to a newsworthy event, like a report being released and an endorsement by a well-respected and well-known community member.

Sample press release format

Date

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact

Title

Organizational Affiliation

Phone Number

TITLE INTENDED TO CATCH THE READER'S EYE

LOCATION [CALLED THE DATELINE] – First sentence sums up the story concisely: who/what/where/when.

In the second paragraph, indicate why this issue or candidate event is significant and newsworthy. Include a quote from an expert, the candidate, or a respected community member emphasizing its significance, with the person's full name and title. Put the most important information at the beginning of the press release; less important information towards the end. This allows a newspaper to print the press release directly in the paper, but shorten it to meet space requirements.

Include basic details toward the end of the press release that will allow the story to be covered, even if a reporter is unable to attend the event or contact additional sources. An additional quote or two from other respected figure(s) is acceptable.

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If an organization is issuing the press release, provide a brief description of the organization here, including its name and purpose.

Format: For a press release, the ideal length is no more than one page. Press releases are typically single spaced, and use short 2–3-sentence paragraphs. Your formatting should look professional. Make sure that all of the information in your press release can be verified. A common press release format is presented here.

Content: Press releases focused on the work of advocacy campaigns must have a news hook that give journalists a reason to cover your issue at this time. Press releases may be run in full as an article by a paper—particularly in the case of local news sources—so make sure to write your press release in a typical news article style: address the who, what, where, when, why, and how of the issue around which you want coverage. Including a quote from the candidate or a person affected by the issue also increases the likelihood of the content being used. (Make sure to get the person's approval for the quote before you send it out.)

It is important to understand that reporters get many press releases, and cannot follow up on all of them. You want yours to be the one they follow up on. After you send your press release to a news outlet, make sure to follow up directly with a phone call to key reporters.

Media Messaging: For Traditional and Social Media

Audience: With media messaging, the audience is typically multifaceted. The intended audience for media messages in advocacy often includes policy

decision-makers, the media who you want to cover your issue or candidate, and subsets of the public who you want to inform and mobilize. In electoral campaigns, potential voters are the audience for these messages.

Purpose: The purpose of your media message is to influence public perception, and in the case of an advocacy campaign, ultimately, your advocacy target(s), via traditional and/or social media coverage.

Format: Traditional media coverage is often very brief; very little of what you say is likely to make it into the final print or broadcast piece. Similarly, social media platforms allow for very limited space for communications, e.g., Twitter’s 280-character limit. We provide some examples of media messages and their format.

Example Media Messages

(Identified by Wallack et al. 1999 and Dorfman and Krasnow 2014)

“It took vision to save Yosemite, dig the Panama Canal, build the Golden Gate Bridge, or go to the moon, but we did it. Some believe universal preschool is the next big idea. Count me in as one of those who believes.”

“It is easy to think of smoking as an adult problem. It is adults who die from tobacco-related diseases. [But]... nicotine addiction begins when most tobacco users are teenagers, so let’s call this what it really is: a pediatric disease.”

“Toys are subjected to strict safety measures ... and yet in the gun industry, there is absolutely no regulation or standards of manufacture.”

What this means is that having and communicating a clear and succinct message is essential for communications using all forms of media. Even when your issue is complex, media messages need to be very, very concise and very clear (Wallack et al. 1999)—typically limited to 15 seconds for broadcast media, 280 characters on Twitter, or a single picture or meme that can be viewed and shared on platforms like Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, or Twitter. Media messages should briefly communicate a take-home message about your issue or candidate in a way that will stick with the reader or viewer.

While a journalist may interview you for much longer than 15 seconds, continue to bring your points back to your core media message. Think about many of the politicians you have seen being interviewed on television—for the most part, they pivot their responses to almost any question back to the same message repeatedly. As frustrating as it can be to watch this, it also does the job—we tend to remember the message these politicians want us to remember, and we often see this message repeated via other media outlets.

Content: Media messages are intended to be persuasive, communicating your stance clearly. Verbal media messages use accessible language designed to evoke a visual that helps guide how readers/viewers think about an issue or a candidate, while visual media messages directly incorporate the visual. Media messages often seek to speak to common values shared by the public, tying your candidate or issue to these common values. They paint a picture of what supporting your campaign’s goals will mean to people (e.g., who is affected, and how, by the issue) (Wallack et al. 1999).

APPLY YOUR SKILLS: Media Messages

Develop a media message for your advocacy or electoral campaign. If you are using this book in a class or group setting, work with a partner to practice and refine it. Your message should include:

- A verbal media message that could be used in a one-on-one meeting or an interview
- A picture or meme that could be used on Instagram or Pinterest (many free meme generators can be found in a quick Web search)
- A Tweet

What is your “hook”?

Review of Key Terms and Concepts

Accessible language: language that is appropriate to the target’s vocabulary and experiences, and does not include jargon, acronyms, and terms used by insiders.

Action alert: a communication used in both electoral and advocacy campaigns to inform supporters in a network about a policy solution or candidate and inspire them to act on its behalf.

Ask: an explicit statement of what you want your target to do.

Background: information that can be published, but only under conditions negotiated with the source. Generally, sources do not want their names published but will agree to a description of their position.

Credibility: being considered worthy of trust.

Deep background: information that can be used but without attribution. The source does not want to be identified in any way, even on condition of anonymity.

Face: a person utilized as a representative of an idea, i.e., a policy problem or message.

Framing: how an issue is presented to an audience and how it is portrayed.

Media deadline: the time when articles must be completed to go to press or to meet deadlines for various television and radio news programs.

Message: the important point or theme that we want to communicate.

Message box exercise: a common way to develop message, which requires you to outline the positive things you say about yourself/your candidate, the positive things your opponent will say about himself/herself, the negative things you might say about them, and the negative things they might say about you/your candidate.

News hook: information included in a press release which catches readers’ attention and assists in the development of a deeper interest of the topic presented within the reader.

Off the record: information that cannot be used for publication.

On the record: information that can be used with no caveats, quoting the source by name.

Policy brief: policy summary aimed at decision-makers, often elected officials who may have the opportunity to vote on policy recommendations, but may not have time to fully research the policy.

Press release: communication used to persuade media audiences to cover an event, an issue, or a candidate.

Professional use of self: the idea that we, as individual social workers, are an essential component of our interventions.

Professionalism: adhering to standards of behavior which reflect positive work ethic, responsibility, and credibility. Important in interpersonal relationships and in written and oral communications.

Social media: websites and applications (“apps”) that allow users to share content and interact without meeting in person.

Soundbite: a short, self-contained version of your message.

Stay on message: consistently emphasizing the same message in communications.

Testimony: a statement often used as a part of advocacy campaigns, designed to persuade policy decision-makers to help advance your policy goals and influence the narrative around your advocacy issue.

Tone: the sound, pitch, and speed of one’s voice that a speaker uses.

Traditional media: refers to print (newspapers and newsmagazines) and broadcast media (radio and television).

Universal claim: a claim that something is true of every single member of a group or class, without exception.

Resources

Podcasts and Videos

Beth Caldwell press conference (Beth’s statement starts around 5 minutes in): <http://www.fred-hutch.org/en/news/fred-hutch-statement-regarding-proposed-budget-cuts.html>

Claudette Colvin interview: <http://www.npr.org/2009/03/15/101719889/before-rosa-parks-there-was-claudette-colvin> and book: <https://www.amazon.com/Claudette-Colvin-Twice-Toward-Justice/dp/0312661053>

More Perfect radio episode: <http://www.wnyc.org/story/imperfect-plaintiff>

Podcast on politics and family:

<http://www.npr.org/2016/09/13/493615864/when-it-comes-to-our-politics-family-matters>

Podcast about social workers and the media: <http://socialworkpodcast.blogspot.com/2013/02/social-workers-and-media-interview-with.html>

Other Resources

Communications to Promote Interest:

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/participation/promoting-interest>

Wellstone resource on direct mail and campaign literature: <http://www.wellstone.org/resources/tips-direct-mail-and-campaign-literature> or go to <http://www.wellstone.org/> and click on “Tools” in the menu bar. On the landing page click “By Keyword” in the search bar and type in “Direct Mail”. Press “enter” and in the results, click “Direct Mail and Campaign Literature”.

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