

# Building a Communications Campaign

---

There are many media tactics referenced in these guidelines, including:

- Press releases/statements, announcing news intended for broad reporter interest;
- Media advisories, alerting press to upcoming events and demonstrating their importance;
- Op-eds, building public knowledge/support for an issue;
- Social media activism, elevating public discourse, encouraging reporters via social outlets;
- White papers, creating authoritative guides on an issue;
- Press conference calls, providing a chance for many reporters to hear directly from you and other experts about a breaking news item;
- Editorial board memos, urging newspapers to editorialize for or against an issue; and
- Community events/rallies, generating attention and demonstrating community support for an issue or policy.

## 1. LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

### *Find and develop validators.*

A validator is a third-party person, not a professional advocate, with an important point of view who can be useful in advocating for proactive policy. It's useful to have a variety of validators working with the media and the legislature, such as patients, physicians, legislators, and academics. Confirm with possible validators the level of involvement they can have (e.g. conducting print, television, or radio interviews or speaking at a press conference) and if they have personal stories they are willing to share (such as a physician discussing the biased counseling she/he must conduct or a patient describing harassment entering a clinic). Hold training sessions on messaging for your potential spokespeople and validators, including practice interviews.

If validators are willing to tell personal stories, compile those and organize them into narratives based on their central theme. The three tenants of the PRH Act can be a useful thematic guide:

- Care grounded in evidence-based medicine
- Care free from intimidation and violence
- Care without political interference

### *Develop key messages.*

Adapt boilerplate messaging, included with this toolkit, to the specifics of your state legislative campaign. It's useful to have separate talking points to use before the legislation is introduced, which should not reveal specifics, and after the legislation is introduced, to drum up community support and educate community members on the merits of the bill. This messaging needs to be approved by legislative and coalition partners.

As you develop talking points, research statistics and facts that bolster your arguments. It can be useful to have this kind of data on hand when speaking with the media or legislators.

### ***Assess your state's media landscape.***

Before you begin media outreach, research which editorial boards, journalists, and opinion writers have covered reproductive rights issues favorably in the past. Include those who haven't written on reproductive rights before, but have covered related progressive issues favorably, such as health care access, LGBTQ rights, immigrants' rights, or other women's issues.

In addition to finding friendly media outlets, determine which media outlets are important to legislative success, such as a specific newspaper read by most of your state's legislators. Identify which reporters in these outlets cover reproductive health, as well as their editors. Follow them on social media and read their past coverage to get a sense of what to expect for their coverage of your legislation.

## **2. STARTING THE PUBLIC CAMPAIGN: ORGANIZING AND MAKING THE CASE**

### ***Conduct media outreach.***

Meet with the key reporters and opinion writers you've identified to share your validators' stories and demonstrate the importance of this proactive policy in your state. In addition to meeting with these writers, pitch stories that make the case for this legislation to radio stations, long-lead reporters, and statewide magazines. If possible, offer interviews with those validators who have powerful personal stories to share.

### ***Begin online and offline community education and activism.***

Determine your social media strategy, including messaging and a hashtag. Ensure that all of your validators and partners who will be engaged on social media are in agreement on the preferred language around the broad issues, messaging, and the Act.

As you get closer to the introduction of your legislation, you'll need volunteer support at rallies, petition drives, and other events, so reach out to your lists early. Create a central database of interested volunteers with your coalition partners, and prep these volunteers with talking points and key facts. Train them on how to speak about the issues, what to do if they are approached by the press, and how to respond to members of the opposition if confronted.

As you get closer to the introduction, you can also post a petition supporting the legislation online and advertise it on all coalition partners' websites and social media accounts. You can also gather petition signatures at community events. Be sure to publicize these events on social media using your hashtag, and share photos afterward. If you feel confident about community support and turnout, you may want to invite friendly media. If you are less confident, you can share photos with outlets after the event instead.

## **3. PUBLICIZING THE INTRODUCTION OF YOUR STATE'S ACT**

### ***Host a press conference as the launch event for the introduction of your legislation.***

Begin to prepare for this event several months ahead of time. First, determine which date works for your key legislators and validators and begin to look for a venue. Secure a diverse set of speakers, including legislators, medical providers, patients, and community members if possible. Build a broad media list of reporters, editors, and producers at local TV and radio stations, print outlets, and blogs with whom

you will publicize the event. You can also alert trusted reporters that the legislation will be introduced shortly, under embargo.

Draft a media advisory publicizing the press conference, to be released to your media list the week of the event. Follow up with reporters aggressively to ensure maximum attendance. As you near the launch, ask key validators to draft op-eds to be published following the introduction of legislation, and have editorial board memos, a press release, and a white paper if possible ready to immediately following the press conference. Around this time, you can also allow trusted reporters to preview the legislation, under embargo.

Be sure to maximize the impact of this press conference using social media. Post and tweet photos of speakers and any dramatic moments, along with key lines from validators. You can also use social media to target legislators and reporters, and let your grassroots activists engage directly with these people from their own accounts.

### ***Continue to conduct media outreach immediately after the launch event.***

After your launch event, continue to capitalize on this momentum with a press call the following week. Publicize this call aggressively, but be careful to ensure that opponents do not attend this call by requiring RSVPs and verifying the identity of everyone calling in. At the same time, request editorial board meetings at outlets that have not written about the legislation, and submit op-eds and letters to the editor. Publicize any coverage you receive on social media, encouraging legislators to support the bill and crediting reporters who have covered it.

## **4. USING COMMUNICATIONS TO MOVE TOWARD PASSAGE OF YOUR STATE'S ACT**

As your campaign progresses, continue to invite friendly media to community events and legislative visits, or share photos with them afterward. New legislative developments, such as hearings and votes, are optimal times to reach out to media with press advisories and releases, to pitch interviews with validators, and to advocate for coverage by editorial boards.

Social media allows your grassroots base to engage with reporters and legislators, so continue to publicize your campaign online. Frequently post links to your petition, and offer ways for activists to contact their representatives to show support.

# Sample Communications Campaign Timeline

## Before legislation is introduced

- Determine your spokespeople and train them well
- Build strong media lists
- Meet with reporters to brief them on the issue
- Draft messaging and talking points on the issue and legislation (sample messaging guidelines and a message box focused on a medical framework are included with this toolkit)
- Use messaging to inform press advisories, releases, and statements to come
- Build social media audience and educate followers on need for legislation

## When legislation is introduced

- Hold press conference with spokespeople and legislators announcing bill
- Push editorial boards to cover legislation favorably
- Submit op-eds and letters to the editor from supporters and validators to local papers (sample op-ed included with this toolkit)
- Use social media to encourage press coverage and legislative support

## After legislation is introduced

- Hold press call to elaborate on need for legislation and publish white paper showing research backing legislation
- Keep pressing for editorial and reporter coverage of the legislation
- Ask legislators to schedule public hearing where supporters can testify
- Plan lobbying day in the statehouse for supporters to talk to their representatives about the bill
- Continue to use social media to drive interest in the legislation and issue

## Nearing a legislative action (hearing, vote, legislative deadline...)

- Hold rally at statehouse to generate press and show community support
- Keep pressuring for editorial coverage, targeting hometown papers of key legislators
- Advise press on availability of spokespeople around legislative action

## Following a legislative action

- Respond on social media quickly to legislative moves
- Release congratulatory or condemning statement, depending on news
- Reach out to editorial boards and encourage them to speak out