

GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS & ADVOCACY

a toolkit to help you make change happen



Acknowledgements

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The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States. The Leadership Conference works toward an America as good as its ideals.

The Leadership Conference Education Fund is a 501(c)(3) organization that builds public will for federal policies that promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States.

Access this material online at http://www.civilrights.org/action_center/toolkit.

Dear Friend:

This toolkit was created with you in mind. Its purpose is to educate, equip, encourage, and empower you to make change.

Our goal is to provide you with the basic structure and strategies needed to plan and carry out an effective grassroots public education or advocacy campaign. It's possible to write an entire book on each of the areas covered in this toolkit – in fact, many have been written. But you don't have to read half a dozen books to put together a strong campaign.

What you need to do is establish your goals, create a strategy, make a step-by-step plan, and mobilize the people, partners, and resources to make it all achievable. This toolkit is meant to be a concise guide to accomplishing that. And we include plenty of suggested resources if you want more in-depth information.

The Leadership Conference and The Education Fund provide leadership and coordination to coalition efforts and support the work of national and local partners by providing strategic and technical assistance, preparing materials, offering training, and identifying resources to support coalition efforts. Information on training for grassroots advocacy is provided by The Leadership Conference; information relating to education and coalition building is provided by The Education Fund.

We believe in the power of coalitions to bring people together for a common purpose. History shows that change can be made when diverse voices unite around a shared goal. We hope you will consider us your partners in making needed change happen. You can learn more about our work at www.civilrights.org. You can also reach The Leadership Conference field staff at 202-466-3315 or at grassroots@civilrights.org.

Onward!



Ellen Buchman, Vice President, Field Operations
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USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a broad term used to describe the ever-growing array of interactive communications, networking, and organizing activities that take place using digital and mobile technologies. Among the key characteristics of the changing social media environment are democratization and interactivity.

There are fairly low barriers for individuals, organizations, or campaigns to produce and share material and build and engage networks of friends and supporters. And the flow of information is no longer a one-way street from publisher to follower, but a robust and widening sharing of information, opinion, and opportunities for engagement.

Social media provides organizations with inexpensive—and often free—ways to reach out not only to their own followers and supporters, but to additional target audiences and the much wider universe of online users and activists. It blurs and sometimes erases the lines between what we think of as news outlets and what we think of as advocacy, community building, and political organizing.

Social media services like Facebook (www.facebook.com), Twitter (www.twitter.com), Tumblr (www.tumblr.com), Instagram (used primarily on mobile devices), and others provide opportunities to create and build powerful communities of support for your campaign. Facebook, for example, has more than 1 billion monthly active users, close to 900 million mobile users, and more than 700 million daily users. Twitter has more than 284 million monthly active users and is supported in more than 35 languages.

Using Social Media to Advance Your Campaign

A Campaign Website

Creating a website is one step to building an online presence. People who see something about your campaign in

the news or hear about it from one of their friends will have a place to go to learn more, read campaign materials, find out how to get involved, and make financial contributions. The complexity of your website will depend on the size and scope of your campaign, and whether you're using the site to recruit and manage contact with your supporters. The cost of setting up a basic website is fairly minimal, or it could potentially cost nothing at all. You could create a campaign page on an existing organizational website, if you have one. Or you could use a page on Facebook as your campaign hub, which wouldn't cost anything.

Some guidelines for an effective website:

- Give some creative thought to your campaign graphics. Make your home page attractive and engaging and make sure it gives people a clear sense of what your campaign is about. Cover the basics: who you are, what your mission and goals are, what kind of activities you're engaged in, and what individuals can do to make a difference.
- Designate someone to update the website regularly with news about the campaign, short notes from the campaign manager, interviews with activists about why they are volunteering, videos taken from campaign events or trainings, etc.
- Make it easy for people to volunteer, sign a petition, or report contact with a targeted public official. Make it easy for people to donate.

Create a Blog

A blog is generally less formal and more interactive than a website. It's a place where you and your colleagues can share breaking news relevant to your campaign, post updates about events and campaign milestones, interact with volunteers, and generally build enthusiasm for the

campaign. It will take someone's time to keep the blog updated, to monitor readers' comments if you set up your site to allow them, and to respond as necessary to comments from supporters or opponents. If you permit readers to post comments, you'll need a policy in place to deal with offensive comments. Some sites require users to register to discourage destructive, anonymous commenting. You can sign up for a free, easy-to-use blogging platform at www.wordpress.com or www.blogger.com.

In addition, identify important "influencers" -- other bloggers and activists who write about the issue you are working on. Reach out to them in the early stages of your campaign, and invite them to help you plan the online portion of your outreach and organizing strategies. You can reach a wide readership more quickly by getting attention (or writing your own guest post) on a blog with an established audience than by building your own blog audience from scratch. Once written, sharing blog posts on any social media sites your campaign is using will help amplify your message.

Create a social media presence

More than seven in 10 online adults use Facebook, and almost a quarter of online adults use Twitter. The odds are that many of your own board, staff, coalition partners, and campaign allies are on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites, and you should be on them too.

Think of a campaign page on Facebook as an extension of your website, with an important difference: people won't have to come to your site to get information (or remember, a Facebook page, for some campaigns, may serve as the primary website). With some creative thinking about your messaging you can build a large network of followers, fans, and supporters. Learn more about Facebook organization pages at www.facebook.com/pages/learn.php.

Facebook

Facebook is optimized for sharing of photographs, so consider creating a graphic image to reach more people than with text-only status updates. According to online strategists at Social Movement Technologies, the emotions that provoke sharing are anger, awe, and anxiety—your messages should be designed to evoke at least one of those emotions. Links to those images can also be sent by email and text.

Facebook also offers an affordable way to reach very specific target audiences with advertising.

Twitter

Twitter takes you one more step into an active conversation with people who are interested in your cause or

campaign. The most notable feature of Twitter is that the size of your tweets is limited to 140 characters. These short messages will reach your followers online or via a mobile device. Your goal is building your number of followers and keeping them engaged with interesting, entertaining, empowering and up-to-the-minute news about your campaign and calls for urgent action. There's an art form to sending out short tweets that grab people's attention and encourage them to "re-tweet" to their own followers. They can link back to your latest video or call for action.

One feature of Twitter—which is now used on other social media platforms—is called a "hashtag." These are used to help people follow what others are posting on a topic. Hashtags start with a "#"—or hash sign. For example, people following comprehensive immigration reform might use #CIR as a hashtag and follow messages on that topic. If a lot of people are tweeting with a hashtag, that topic will be identified by twitter as "trending," and will be promoted even more widely to other twitter users.

Online activism can be a powerful way to capture the energy of a particular moment and galvanize others to take action. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, created by activists in response to the lack of indictment in Trayvon Martin's death, became a focus for organizing in response to police killings of unarmed Black men. #BlackLivesMatter provides both a message and a widely accessible means of sharing information, discussing strategy, and promoting lasting calls to action for a decentralized grassroots movement.

Organizing by Text Messaging

The number of people using mobile devices like smartphones has skyrocketed; a mobile device may be the only regular Internet access for some people. Text messaging has become an important organizing tool. At an event or on written materials you can ask people to send a single-word text message to a specific number

Tweeting for Change

Here are some online tools for effective Twitter advocacy:

For petitions: <http://act.ly/>

For following and communicating with members of Congress: <http://tweetcongress.org/>

For following and identifying influential progressive voices on Twitter: <http://tweetprogress.us/>

or “short code”—an easy way for you to get someone’s contact information, and for them to connect to your campaign. You should try to collect cell phone numbers at every opportunity; people are much more likely to read a text message than an email.

Online Video

Online video is a powerful tool for educating and engaging viewers. A video doesn’t have to “go viral”—experience explosive growth in viewership because people share it widely—in order to have an impact. It is easy to set up a channel on YouTube and post videos there. You can use short interviews to introduce the campaign, promote highlights of public events, and tell the kinds of stories that show what kind of impact that people can have by helping you reach your goal. Use other social media like Facebook and Twitter to help drive traffic. The most effective videos, like effective messages, generate an emotional response that taps into people’s core values.

Reaching Out to Online Media

Most newspapers have both websites, which are essentially online versions of the daily paper, and blogs, which give their reporters a chance to write and comment quickly and often more informally about topics they normally cover.

Reporters are often doing double-duty, writing standard news stories for the newspaper and looking for quicker tidbits for the blog. When you reach out to blogs and bloggers who are associated with mainstream journalism outlets—newspapers or magazines—treat them as you would other journalists. Introduce yourself and your campaign, encourage them to cover you and consider you a source. Pass along anecdotes, bits of inside information, and other material that might not make it into a straight news story but will help them fill out the blog. *See more about guidelines for talking with and working with members of the media in the “Communicating Effectively” section of this toolkit.*

Many blogs that are not affiliated with major news organizations also function at least partially as news aggregators, compiling links to other news sites, and as producers of content. They may serve as outlets for you or members of your campaign to post your own commentaries.

Other blogs are organized around political ideologies or specific issues. Whatever your issue, there are almost certainly blogs focused on it, some associated with advocacy organizations and others run by individual activists. There are well-read blogs focusing on communities of color, people with disabilities, LGBT advocacy and politics, and more. Many state capitals and other urban areas have

influential blogs covering state and local politics and community affairs. Among their readers will be people you are trying to influence: journalists, public officials, and people who work for public officials or government agencies. Get to know blogs relevant to your campaign. Contact the editor(s) to see if you can post a guest blog or become a regular contributor. Reach out to contributors who seem to attract a lot of readers and commenters. Add your own comments to relevant posts.

Advertise Online

Many public education and advocacy campaigns don’t have big advertising budgets with the ability to buy ads in newspapers or on local television and radio. But you might be able to afford online advertising. It is possible to target online advertising in an extremely focused way to people who are searching for information about your issue, to websites that attract members of your target audience, or even directly to the personal pages of people on social networks such as Facebook.

One of the simplest forms of advertising is Google’s Adwords. This program allows you to have a sponsored link appear when someone searches for topics related to your campaign. The cost of the ad will vary, but you pay only when someone follows your link, and Google gives you a lot of flexibility in limiting your overall spending. Google has a [grant program](#) that provides free advertising for qualified 501(c)(3) organizations and offers [extensive guidance](#) in getting the most out of those free ads.

New Possibilities

The constantly changing world of new media offers new ways to educate and energize activists, identify and recruit new supporters, create visibility for your campaign, and potentially reach huge audiences at little cost. In addition, the interactive nature of blogs and social networks can help you benefit from the ideas and enthusiasm of supporters who take their own responsibility for spreading your message. And that can help you create a longer and stronger connection with individuals and a more powerful personal commitment to your campaign.

If social media is a new world for you, don’t be intimidated. Find colleagues or volunteers who live and breathe this world and tap into their expertise. Look for opportunities to recruit student interns who have grown up in the online world. And take advantage of online websites and discussion boards that can help you understand how to make new media work for you. The following resources can get you started.

Social Media Resources

The New Organizing Institute (www.neworganizing.com) runs a progressive advocacy and campaign train-

ing program focused on cutting-edge online organizing techniques (e.g. writing effective emails, engaging bloggers, leveraging social networks, utilizing video), political technology (e.g. using data effectively, progressive technology infrastructure), and the intersection with field and management of these areas of new organizing. Its [online organizing toolbox](#) provides an array of how-to videos on story-telling, online video, advertising, fundraising, integrating online and field organizing, and more. You can read its Encyclopedia of New Organizing, watch previously recorded webinars online, and sign up for activist gatherings and trainings such as its Rootscamp, an interactive “unconference” where participants create the agenda and share their own successful stories and strategies.

- The Case Foundation’s “Gear up for Giving” project includes links to free tutorials about social media strategy, blogging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and more at: www.casefoundation.org/social-media-tutorials.
- The article: “Dissecting the craft of online political advocacy” can be found at www.epolitics.com. Epolitics (www.epolitics.com) has specific sections on the use of different social networks like Facebook.
- K Street Café is a blog where experts from a variety of backgrounds share new and novel ways technology, the Internet and social media are being used to shape public policies at: www.kstreetcafe.com.
- Companies such as Democracy in Action <http://salsalabs.com/democracyinaction> offer a package of tools for managing building an email list, creating advocacy alerts & petitions, and collecting donations.
- Network for Good also has some free tools for online fundraising at www1.networkforgood.org/.
- Google for Nonprofits is also a good resource for online tools at www.google.com/nonprofits/.
- EchoDitto is a new media firm that provides some free advice on best practices and can be found at www.echoditto.com/best/organizing.
- Here’s an article about how one progressive religious campaign, Standing on the Side of Love, used social media in its campaigns to support LGBT equality and immigration reform: <http://krausnotes.com/2010/04/10/finding-faith-a-look-at-the-standing-on-the-side-of-love-campaign/>.
- Frogloop (www.frogloop.com/) is a blog about social networking and online organizing for nonprofit organizations sponsored by Care2. It also has tips about using social networks and tracking their effectiveness.
- M&R Strategic Services is a communications consulting firm that helps nonprofits use online tools. You can find a set of case studies and articles at: www.mrss.com/publications.html.
- There are a number of tools for adding text to images to create graphic “memes” for Facebook and other social media. Among them are Preview (for macs), Paint (for PCs), [Imgur.com](http://imgur.com), Pixlr.com, and Quickmeme.com.
- Social Media Technologies is a nonprofit that offers a number of resources for organizing effectively online, including a [free 90-minute webinar that covers 14 tools and tactics to win campaigns in the digital age](#).
- Salsa Labs, Green Memes, and a number of other organizations have collaborated to produce “The Most Amazing Online Organizing Guide Ever,” which is free to use and share. The 80-page guide covers the use of Facebook, Twitter, memes, use of photography, and running an effective meeting. It also includes several case studies and a list of resources.
- [The Shorty Awards](#) honor “social good” marketing campaigns.