



# THE SPIN PROJECT

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You gotta have a plan.

## Strategic Communications Planning

The purpose of a strategic communications plan is to integrate all the organization's programs, public education and advocacy efforts. By planning a long-term strategy for your efforts, you will be positioned to be more proactive and strategic, rather than consistently reacting to the existing environment. The strategic plan will help you deploy resources more effectively and strategically by highlighting synergies and shared opportunities in your various programs and work areas.

The creation and adoption of a strategic communications plan represents a significant step for any organization. For many organizations, the adoption of such a plan represents a cultural shift toward communications and a clear recognition that all the organization's efforts have a communications element. Public education, grassroots organizing, research, public advocacy, direct service and even fundraising are all, at their core, communications

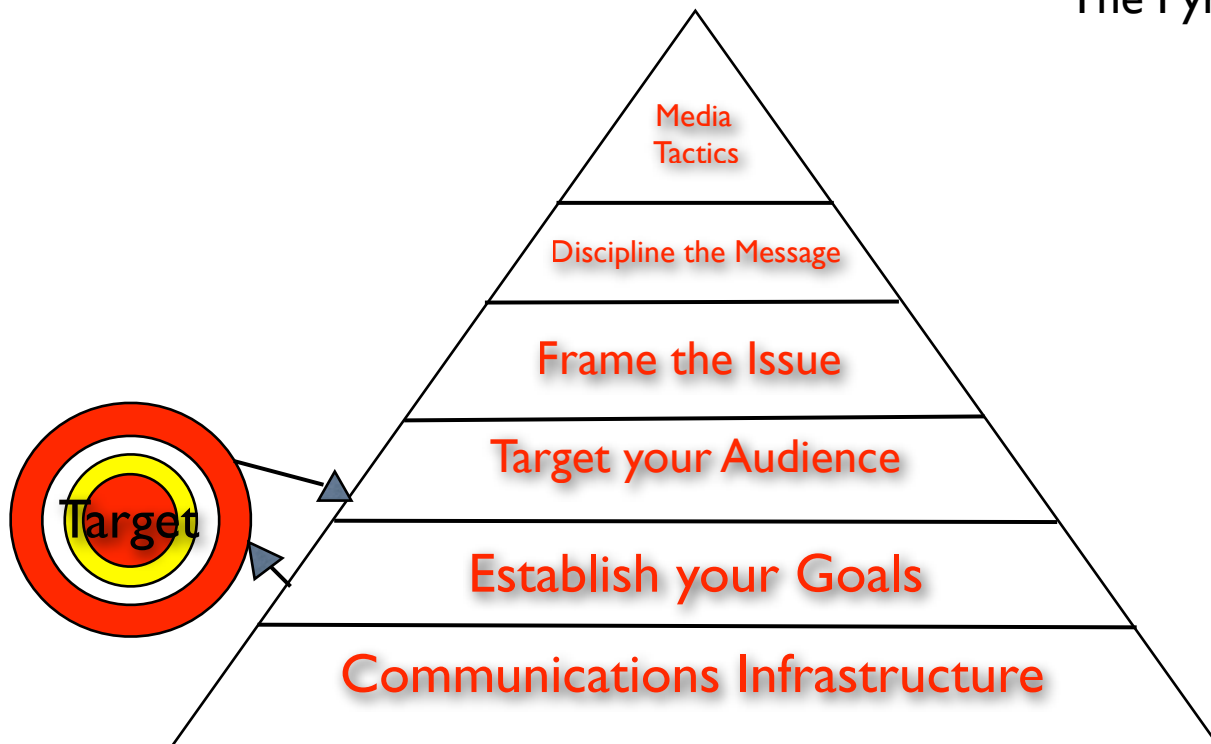
tasks vital to the health and success of a nonprofit organization.

At the SPIN Project we firmly believe that a strategic communications plan has the power to transform an organization: both in terms of your credibility and status in your community, and in terms of the way you work together as a team to achieve your mission and vision for your community.

The communications plan pyramid on the next page outlines six questions you must answer before you even begin to implement your media tactics:

1. Assess your communications infrastructure.
2. Establish your goals.
3. Who is your target?
4. Who is your audience?
5. What is your frame?
6. What is your message?

## The Pyramid



### Communications Plan Template

Use this worksheet in conjunction with the communications plan pyramid model to develop your communications strategy for a specific campaign. This template follows the pyramid from the ground up.

#### Step 1

#### Assess Past Communications – Lessons Learned

What worked - describe your top three communications wins and three worst blunders from the last two years.

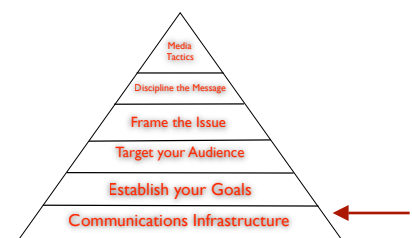
#### Step 2

#### Lay the Foundations of Winning Communications

##### *Communications Infrastructure*

**What is your communications capacity?**

- How much staff time are you willing to devote to communications? If you feel you can not afford communications staff, are there communications

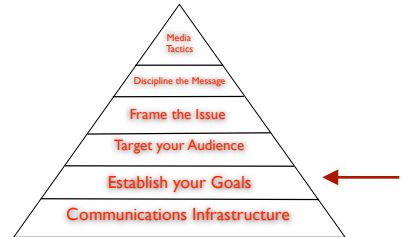


- funding opportunities on the horizon?
- Who will do the work—are they comfortable with and knowledgeable about communications?
- What is your program budget? If you do advocacy, are you willing to commit 30% of that to communications?
- How powerful is your brand? Is it well known?
- The answers to these questions are the foundation from which your communications work will thrive or fail.

**Goals**

**What are your program, campaign or organizational goals?**

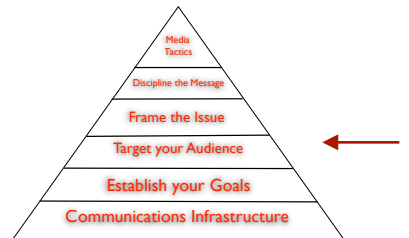
- Why are you launching communications efforts in the first place? What, specifically, do you want to win?
- What is your positive vision for the future?



**Target**

**Who can give you what you want? (i.e., councilperson for District X)**

- Can you directly influence this individual’s decision making?
- If not, who can? Who do you need on your side to get what you want? (i.e., voters in District X)

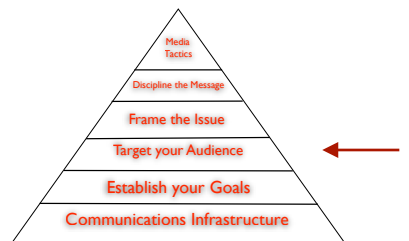


**Your Audience**

**The people who can to persuade the decision maker to do what you want (i.e., voters in District X).**

Know your audience through research:

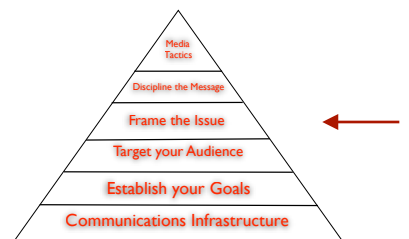
- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Door-knocking/canvassing
- Talking to strangers in the supermarket, on airplanes, etc.



**Frame the Issue**

**Describe the issue in a way that resonates with the values and needs of your audience, and is also interesting to journalists, or “newsworthy.”**

- What is this issue really about?
- Who is affected?
- Who are the players?
- What hooks does this frame contain?
- What pictures and images communicate this frame?



**For Direct Service organizations:** What image do you want your organization to convey? With what organizations, political positions and people do you want your organization to be associated?

### ***Craft and Discipline your Message***

The SPIN Project recommends a message made of the following three-part framework. Each part should be no longer than 35 words.

#### **Problem**

Introduce your frame. Describe how your issue affects your audience and its broader impacts.

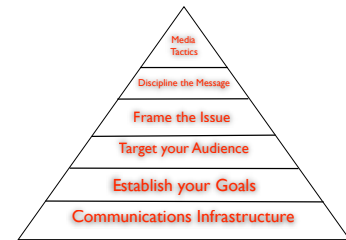
#### **Solution**

Speak broadly about the change you wish to see. Speak to peoples' hearts with values-rich language and images.

#### **Action**

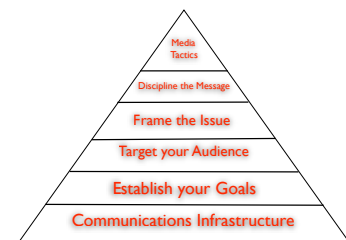
Call on your audience to do something specific.

- Make sure key people in your organization buy into this message.
- Craft your message to be appealing to journalists and convincing to your target audience.
- Brainstorm soundbites, or spoken language that expresses much or all of your message in 7-12 seconds.



### ***Select and train spokespeople***

- Who are the best messengers to reach your target audience?
- **Hint: the most powerful person in the organization is not always the best person to put on camera. Choose someone with an effective speaking style and a look that appeals to your audience.**
- Have spokespeople practice delivering message on camera. Review and critique the tape. Adjust the message if needed at this stage; something that works on paper may fail when you actually say it.



**Step 3****Get to work!**

Now that you know what you want to say and why, it's time to figure out how you're going to broadcast your message.

The first step is to decide which local, regional, and national TV, radio, and print outlets will move your target audience to take the action you desire. Make a list of the top 20 outlets that would have the most impact for your strategy, ordered according to importance to your campaign. Next to the outlet name, list the journalist(s) there with whom you want to cultivate a relationship and the type of piece in which you'd like your organization featured. Here are some examples of types of pieces to aim for:

- TV, Radio or Print News Story
- Op Ed
- Letter to the Editor
- Radio or TV Talkshow Appearance
- Magazine Feature Story

Now it's time to plan how to attract your targeted media outlets to cover your story and carry your message. Plan—along a realistic timeline—events, products, story releases, and other tactics to get your message to your target audience. Recall the successes you recounted in **Step 1**, but don't let your past successes and failures restrain your imagination or strategic sense.

What will you pitch to the above outlets/reporters? What's the news you're providing them with? What are the hooks that make your news interesting to journalists? Choose from the list below and brainstorm your own:

- New Study/Report/Announcement
- Event/Anniversary
- Trend
- Localize a National Story
- Dramatic Human Interest
- Controversy
- Fresh Angle on Old Story
- Calendar Hook/Holiday
- Profile of Fascinating Person
- Response to Big News Story
- Celebrity Involvement

**Targeting Examples**

**Note: This list does not need to include *The New York Times* and CNN; your local TV station or a Capitol Hill newsletter may be much more important to moving your campaign forward.**

**Cleveland Plain Dealer**

News Story

Rich Exner, Political Staff Writer

OpEd

Linda Maelstrom, Opinions Editor

**Channel 7 News (ABC)**

Evening News Story

Kim Jones, Evening News Producer

**Channel 34 News (Telemundo)**

Noon Talkshow Spot

George Melendez, Host

**Ohio State Legislators' Newsletter**

News Story

Jacob Jones, Publisher

Etc... Target 20 or so outlets, depending on your organization's capacity.

While the SPIN Project focuses on using news media to communicate for change, be aware that many options exist, each with advantages and disadvantages. Below are some alternatives to using media relations to spread news. While each are appropriate at different times and most allow you total control of the message, many can be expensive:

*Print or electronic newsletters*

**PRO**

You control the message

Sometimes a good fundraising tool

**CON**

Print newsletters are expensive to produce

Limited audience

*Organizational Website*

**PRO**

You control the message

Can be edited or updated instantly

Can be used to solicit donations

**CON**

Needs constant updating to remain relevant

Ineffective if left to stand alone; must be part of broader online strategy

*Email Blasts*

**PRO**

You control the message

Inexpensive

You can monitor audience use

**CON**

Often ignored

*Advertising and Public Service Announcements*

**PRO**

You control the message and presentation

**CON**

Ads are often expensive

PSAs often run late at night to a small audience

*Door-Knocking*

**PRO**

You can gauge responses to your message on the spot

**CON**

Expensive to reach large numbers of people

**Last but not least, the details:**

What events and materials do you need to create to communicate with reporters?

***Media Events***

- Simply holding a press conference is not enough unless the speakers include Madonna, George Bush or Barry Bonds. Instead, create an event!
- Make it visual! Use props! Even if they feel a little awkward, they will often work on camera. For example, if you're releasing a report about water quality, have scientists with lab coats and goggles take samples on camera.
- Be sure to inform journalists of the visual opportunities you're providing.
- Consider spending the money to hire a professional photographer to document your event. High quality photos are invaluable for websites, brochures and in funder meetings.
- At any press event, be armed with Media Kits to hand to all reporters. These include:
  - Media Advisories
  - News Releases
  - Fact Sheets
  - Brief bios of spokespeople
  - Organizational Brochure
  - Your Business Card
- Note: All of these materials should be available on your website in an Online Press Room.*

***“Mediagenic” Materials***

Reporters will always appreciate the fresh information, compelling stories and authentic spokespeople your organization works can provide. Consider packaging and broadcasting your organizations findings and case studies in deliverables such as:

- Reports
- Polls
- Scorecards
- Top Ten Lists

**Step 4****Track and Evaluate*****Track Coverage***

Create a system to capture your media hits.

- Consider hiring a print news clipping service
- Contact an audio/video clipping service prior to major TV and radio hits to ensure capture of those hits.
- Search news sites such as Nexis.com and Google News for mentions of your organization.
- Enlist staff or community volunteers to collect print hits and record TV and radio appearances and features.
- Note which journalists covered your story. If you liked the coverage, thank them tactfully for a well-balanced story. Continue to cultivate your relationship with them.

***Evaluate***

After each effort, assess what was successful and what could improve. It might help to wait a week or more after the event to begin assessment, as this will allow for perspective to develop and can result in more honest assessment.

***Celebrate***

Be proud of your work! It's making the world a better place!