

Getting Your Message Out



CAMPAIGN**SCHOOL**
for women

Introduction

Communications is a critical component of your campaign, and political life overall. Developing clear messages and familiarity with communications and social media tools and platforms is a fundamental part of becoming and being a leader — so much so that it deserves its own booklet!

This booklet contains the basics of a strong communications strategy, including developing your messages and brand, managing your message, understanding social media, using advertising to your advantage, as well as tips and cautions.

There is a reason politics is called “public life” or “public service”— you, your messages, and your position on the issues will be a topic of public discourse and profile. This can be a significant shift from your pre-political life, and can have distinct advantages and challenges. Learning to work with the media and manage your communications will be an important part of your campaign, and, if elected, your time in office.

Social media has become the primary source of information for citizens, and a quick and effective way to connect with elected leaders. Social media has changed how people discover, read, and share news, information, and content, and puts powerful publishing and communications technology into the hands of individuals.

Social media also allows for information, whether true or not, to spread quickly and easily. It has proven to be a powerful tool, and a potential pitfall, for past and current social or political blunders. Learning how to use social media, and other media strategies, effectively will strengthen your message and confidence as a candidate.



Develop clear messages.

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You Will be News

As soon as you announce your candidacy, the media and the public will want to know what you have to say about the issues central to the campaign.

Make sure you are comfortable responding to the issues before you announce your candidacy. Be prepared to respond to any manner of question concerning local issues, your party's platform, as well as broader issues facing the community, province, or country.

As you prepare to announce your candidacy, have a standard resumé and biography outlining your background, career history, general goals, and any personal information you wish to share on hand. These are items that you can give to the media or members of the public looking to learn more about you and your views. It will also eliminate the need for you to repeat your story and risk leaving out important factors about your qualifications.

For incumbents, be prepared to share and, at times, defend your record as a public official. For new candidates, be prepared to highlight why you are the winning choice and what you will bring to the table as an elected official.

Media training will help you effectively deliver your message and effectively present yourself in front of the media, through techniques such as hand gestures and voice projection.

Choose your words wisely

If you wouldn't be comfortable saying it to a crowd or seeing it in a paper, don't share it in print or verbally. This includes personal posts, email correspondence, and, campaigning or not, any time you are in public.

This rule also applies to real life. Any time you are in a public or private setting, assume you are being recorded. Campaigns often send 'plants' to an opponent's campaign events to record the candidate, hoping to get something that can be used against the candidate later in the race.

A trusted mentor, someone with experience in politics, can be a good sounding board and provide feedback on how you respond under pressure.



What's Your Agenda?

Most people have definite, but broad, ideas about the way things should be done and how government should respond.

Becoming a candidate requires finely honing and defining your ideas, and developing your political agenda.

Ensure you have a good understanding of the current situation, and a clear vision of what you want to change.

Know your own mind and how you hope to contribute to the public debate and political arena.

Consider:

- What do you think is working well now?
- What interesting political or societal trends are you aware of?
- In partisan politics, which party and platform best aligns with your thinking and priorities?
- What do you think needs to change?
- What reforms do you think would be beneficial to society?
- How do you aspire to bringing about broad social change?

In partisan politics, your issues should also be compatible with your party's agenda. See the *Learning the Political Landscape* booklet for more information on party politics.

Your Campaign Message

Your campaign message should resonate with the concerns you have heard from your target audience/constituency. It should also show how you differ from your opponents.

Your message should be:

- **concise**
- **clear and sincere**
- **truthful and credible**
- **persuasive and important to voters**

Ensure your issues are **consistent and compatible** with your agenda.

Key Questions

There are questions you will be asked multiple times that you can prepare for. Create one-minute statements that answer these five questions:

1 Who are you?

2 How are you qualified to be an elected representative?

3 Why are you running for office?

4 What are you proposing to do to improve the lives of citizens?

5 What is at risk if people don't support your candidacy (things will remain the same, problems will not be addressed, etc.)?

Key Issues and Messages

How will you relate your campaign message to the issues most important to your constituents?

Identify 3-5 key issues and create a brief message addressing each based on your values, your perspective on the issue, and your party's position(three to five sentences each).

1 Key issue _____

Message _____

2 Key issue _____

Message _____

3 Key issue _____

Message _____

4 Key issue _____

Message _____

5 Key issue _____

Message _____

Know Your Opponents

It is important to know the strengths and weaknesses of your electoral opponents.

Be aware of their positions on the concerns of voters, particularly where your opponent differs and agrees with your beliefs and values.

Useful information

- Who are your opponents?
- What are their backgrounds?
- Describe their education.
- Describe their previous jobs.
- Describe their previous elected, appointed, or public positions.
- What are their voting records?
- What previous public statements or important votes have they made?
- Why are they running for office?
- What do they hope to accomplish in office?
- What issues are personally important to them?

Gather information about other candidates from media reports, public meetings, materials published by candidates, and their social media accounts.

Make sure a member of your campaign team or a supporter attends each public event, asks questions, and reports back to you or your campaign manager about what the other candidates had to say.

Do not go to any public meetings or debates without as many supporters as you can muster. The supporter's role is two-fold: to ask difficult and challenging questions of your competition, and to ask you questions that give you an opportunity to outline your views and share your message as the winning candidate.

There may be few ideological differences between candidates. This can often be the case in party nominations when it is even more important to clearly formulate what makes you a different and viable choice for the party membership.

Personally attacking other candidates could damage your reputation.

Interacting with the Media

Handling the media is a skill you need to develop as both a candidate and a politician.

The relationship between the media and the candidate is interdependent: the media cannot do a story without a candidate, and the candidate needs the media to get her message out to a wider audience.

A respectful relationship with the media will help ensure that your position on issues is articulated fairly and accurately.

Media Do's

- Be polite and clear about your limits, and always bring the subject back to your key messages. If the media asks you a question you find objectionable or too personal, do not feel obligated to answer.
- Make an effort to be on good terms with reporters, commentators, and columnists, along with their editors, as they determine what and how much to write about you and your local campaign. Interacting with local reporters on social media is one way to reach and garner interest from the local media and beyond. However, just like traditional media, you must be aware of your social media content to ensure you are managing your messages strategically.
- Stay aware of what is shared to the media and track how the media presents that information.
- Keep updated media lists with names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail before an election. This should include local, provincial, and national media outlets of all forms, including print, electronic, radio, and television.
- Maintain a separate media list that includes reporters, columnists, and commentators specific to your constituency or riding so that you can be sure that press releases and other notices get to your contacts and are not overlooked or forgotten.
- Keep track of your media allies: it will become clear early on which reporters are supportive of you or the issues you focus on.
- Always respond to a media request even if you don't intend to grant an interview. It is not only professional, but could be helpful later when you want coverage on a particular issue.
- Try to know what issue the reporter is asking about in advance. Have your research officer provide you with as much information as possible before you speak to the reporter, including what your opponents may be saying about that same issue. But most importantly, as a candidate, you need to know your message and stick with it during any media interview. Be consistent and strategic.

Media Don'ts

- **Don't believe that anything is EVER "off the record"**. Everything you say may be reported. If you don't want to read it on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper, don't say it.
- Don't try to pretend you know the facts when you don't. If you are asked questions about an issue you don't have an answer to, say so. Most reporters and voters will respect a candidate who is honest and upfront about what they know and what they don't know. Make a commitment to get back to them later, do the research, and get back to them as promised.
- Don't assume that the reporter is knowledgeable on the issue or is trying to trip you up deliberately. They likely had little time to research or gather background material in advance of the assignment. Providing background information will make their jobs easier, and will ensure the coverage is accurate. This will also help to build a trusting relationship that benefits both the reporter and the candidate.
- Don't overreact to bad press. The purpose of an interview is to communicate your message.
- Don't make promises to the media or the public that you are not prepared to keep.



Keep in mind that the **party leaders** will dominate most of the election coverage locally, provincially, and federally.

The Press Release, the Press Conference

In most cases, the media will be pursuing you for a reaction to an issue or event that may have an impact on your campaign. However, there will be times when you have something to say, and will seek media coverage.

There are two fundamental tools for this purpose: the press release and the press conference.

The Press Release

Try to keep press releases to one page, and include just enough information to pique the interest of reporters. Reporters may not contact you for direct comment if they feel the press release provides all the information they need, or the release may be passed over because reporters do not have time to read lengthy information.

Don't issue a release or conduct a press conference unless you have something important, new, or relevant to say. Overuse of the press release and press conference is the quickest way to dampen media interest in the campaign, and tends to reflect poorly on the candidate.

The Press Conference

When calling a press conference, you are asking reporters to come and listen to what you have to say, take pictures or video, and leave with a story fit to print or air. For this reason, press conferences must be used sparingly.

After the candidate delivers a brief, clear, and concise statement, the floor is opened to questions from the media.

During the question and answer period, keep your answers brief and to the point. Stay on track with your key messages, and present yourself as a confident, competent, and relatable candidate. Some reporters may wish to do a more in-depth interview, and this could be arranged as a one-on-one session after the press conference. Again, if you do not know the answer, don't "wing it". Promise to respond at a later time, and always follow up on phone calls and emails, either directly or through your team.

If there are additional speakers in the press conference, their statements should also be brief and be vetted by the campaign team for accuracy and compatibility. Often, in provincial and federal campaigns, a visit in your local

area by the party leader garners media interests. When possible, build an event with a press conference around that opportunity.

Like press releases, too many press conferences can erode the candidate's credibility. Reserve press conferences for major announcements such as announcing your candidacy, or major developments that have a direct impact on the community.

Be sure to send a media advisory in advance to let news outlets know when and where the press conference will be held, and provide a general idea about its content.

The location of the press conference should take into consideration the media's equipment and space requirements. A microphone that all media can plug into makes their job easier.

Holding a press conference outdoors, when possible, can make for more interesting visuals for television.

Sample Press Release

For immediate release

Smith Announces Run for Party Nomination

February 4, 2018 Antigonish

Jane Smith, 23-year resident of Antigonish, has today announced her intention to seek the _____ Party nomination for the provincial constituency of Antigonish.

In announcing her bid today, Ms. Smith said, "The people of Antigonish have given me a lot over the years and I want to give back in a way that will make a difference by representing them in the Nova Scotia Legislature."

Smith is a teacher at Antigonish High School and has spent many years volunteering at the local women's centre, as a volunteer fire fighter, and as a United Way fundraiser. This is her first bid for provincial office.

"Politics interests me because change interests me, and I think the people of Antigonish want change in representation and in the way politics is done," she said. "I believe, with my experience and skills, I have a valuable contribution to make," she added.

Her primary concerns are the education system, health care, and employment in the Antigonish area.

A native Nova Scotian, Jane Smith moved to Antigonish in 1995 to begin her career as a teacher. She is a single parent who is raising two children: Jason, 17, and Melissa, 15.

For more information, or Ms. Smith's biography and resumé, contact the Committee to

Elect Jane Smith at _____.

Contact:

(name of person handling media enquiries)

(name of party)

(phone number) (email address) (website address)

Social Media

Social media allows people to create and share information, and make connections. It is a powerful publishing and communications tool that has changed how people discover, read, and share content.

People increasingly rely on social media for up-to-date political news and information. It can also spread political information quickly, whether it is true or not.

Social media sites encourage political involvement by uniting like-minded people, reminding users to vote in elections, and generating conversations that help people identify cultural similarities and differences.

Social media activity can help taint a political figure's reputation with information that may or may not be true. Before a politician can confirm, deny, or explain, the public may have already formed an opinion based on that information. When done well, the spread of information on social media for political means can help campaigns immensely.

Campaigning online can be difficult, especially for campaigns with limited resources. Focusing your efforts and cultivating followers on specific platforms can pay off come Election Day. A strong social media presence is vital to any campaign.

The Benefits of Social Media

Reach: Anyone, anywhere has access if they have an Internet connection.

Accessibility: Unlike traditional media, social media is available to anyone for little or no cost, and does not require training to use.

Flexibility: Compared to traditional media, social media allows the user to easily modify content to better engage with their audience.

Interaction: Provides direct feedback and immediate results that traditional media does not, and allows for collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and information.

Managing your media campaign and social media presence

A strong media campaign that reflects your objectives as well as your image is vital to success, especially when engaged in party politics. Maximize your reach by including both traditional and digital media in your plan, and be open to making adjustments to your image or "brand".

Expand Your Reach

While it is important to post regularly on social media, Facebook advertising can help you reach target audiences strategically. Promoting your page or posts based on specific demographic criteria such as location, age, or interests will help expand your reach.

Use Images

Using images will help grab your audience's attention. Adding a picture to posts on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter will help to tell your story, and capture the attention of viewers. Instagram is a great platform for connecting with a younger demographic.

Videos

Online videos are a great way to convey a message and to share and promote information. Videos don't have to be fancy; they can be made with a smartphone or computer camera for quick sharing on social media. Videos also help to generate greater reach and engagement on social media. Also consider Facebook Live and video stories on Facebook and Instagram.

Add Your Social Media Profiles to Your Email Signature and All Campaign Materials

Every personal and campaign email you or your campaign staff send is an opportunity to mention your social media profiles. Add the information into your email signature, and you are all set.

Post Updates from the Right Account

This is a big one. Make sure you and your campaign staff keep personal and campaign social media posts separate. Personal posts sent through official campaign accounts have caused embarrassment for many campaigns.

One way to keep everything separated is to use a separate browser for just campaign posts. Using one browser for your personal social media accounts and another for your political campaign accounts will make it easier to keep your activities separate while letting you stay logged in.

Another option is to use social planning and scheduling tools like Hootsuite or Tweet Deck to help separate personal and professional accounts. These tools also allow you to easily create multiple posts across platforms and plan larger social campaigns.

Ask Your Fans and Followers for Help

The more fans and followers you have, the more avenues you have for increasing your social media following and engagement.

On Facebook, ask for comments, likes, and shares; on Twitter, ask your followers for retweets.

It's important to have someone closely monitoring comments and replies. Negative and/or offensive comments/replies on any social media platform should be dealt with in a timely manner.

Make the right call to action: if your post is about raising money, ask specifically for a donation. If you are looking for volunteers, ask your followers to go to the signup form and register. Be specific. Never assume that someone will just know what to do.

Keep your personal and political activities separate

Create new social media accounts that clearly identify you and your campaign. Identifying your riding (ie: adding HFX at the end of your Twitter handle) as well as your political affiliation, will provide key information to anyone scrolling through their feed.

Develop a strategy to deal with any potential issues in an open and honest way that balances your privacy, the public's right to know, and your chances to succeed in an election. Advice from a trusted mentor will help if you find yourself dealing with personal and difficult issues.

Remember: from the moment you declared as the candidate, you are campaigning at all times. This applies everywhere you go, including online.

Take your past social media activity into consideration

There are several recent examples of political careers that ended because of a past social media posts. Clean up your personal social media accounts by deleting anything that could influence your chances of winning, and change the settings to 'private' so only your friends can see your personal posts.

Social media don'ts

Online politics regularly provides voters with campaign gaffes, mistakes, and embarrassing moments that draw the wrong kind of attention. There are many opportunities for political campaigns and candidates to make online blunders.

Don't let your social media accounts languish

If you start a social media account, provide regular updates. If you start an account and abandon it, followers will be left hanging. Potential followers will see a lack of activity, and may think you've abandoned your campaign. It's better to start at a manageable level and grow your social media activity over time. Most political campaigns use Facebook and Twitter.

Don't post from the wrong account

Many candidates or campaign staff may manage both personal and campaign social media accounts.

If you have multiple accounts, make sure you are logged into the proper account before you post, and take extra care when posting from your smartphone.

A personal opinion posted to a campaign account could appear to be an 'official' campaign position and lead to an embarrassing situation. It can persist long after you have deleted it from your account as quotes and screen-shots. This mistake is more common than you may think.

Don't dismiss fundraising online

It doesn't matter how small your campaign may be. If you have a campaign bank account and a website, you can take online donations.

A number of services provide online donation forms and social media tools that can easily process and deposit donations directly into your campaign bank account.

No matter what social media platforms you choose, **remember:**

Be Smart

Each network has its own language – learn it and use it to ensure you are reaching as broad an audience as possible.

Be Active

If you are on social media, then use it. Post, post, post.

Be Consistent

Each platform may need you to tailor how you get your message out, but be consistent in always echoing the same message via different platforms

Be a Great Listener

Get clues from your audience as to what they want further detail on and what issues are important to them. Give them the information they are seeking to get their votes!

Be Resilient

Grow a tough skin and don't let negative comments get you down. Bullying and offensive remarks dominate social media, but don't let them dominate your campaign.





**Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women**

www.women.novascotia.ca

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