



Youth Transition Funders Group



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Talking About Youth Transitions

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OUR VISION

Although their paths may vary greatly, all young people need to arrive at the same place: ready to work or take advantage of college-level education with the skills they need to participate fully in the workplace, become parents or assume family responsibilities, and participate in the civic life of their communities. Further, they need opportunities and support systems in place. Unfortunately, our society has no coherent social or public policy approach to support young people as they negotiate these transitions—and many vulnerable youth are not given the chance to do so successfully. Our vision is of a society dedicated to providing young people with the skills, supports, and opportunities to transition into meaningful and productive adult lives.



Youth Transition Funders Group

Part 1: Messages & More

Introduction

Young people face myriad obstacles on the way to adulthood today. The ones who stumble along the way do so at the same critical junctures—a run-in with the justice system, the move from foster care to independent living or graduation from high school. Behind these missteps usually lies a common cause: the lack of support for young people from family, communities or schools.

Helping these young people make a successful transition from adolescence to adulthood is the mission of hundreds of advocates, social workers and grant makers across the country—people like you. As part of your work, you’ve probably developed expertise in talking about your work with young people and the specific junctures they must navigate to succeed. A growing and exciting trend among experts in the field is to talk about how all the critical junctures connect.

The reason for this is because experts and practitioners have come to recognize that the issues that affect our most vulnerable youth are often inextricably tied; a patchwork approach to the problems of older youth has resulted in missing the big picture. While exceptions exist, the general lack of coordination among schools, public-care agencies and the courts is severely hampering the ability of our communities to create effective interventions. We must begin viewing these tough problems as interconnected along a continuum that stretches from early childhood to older youth development. Because when we do, our strategies and solutions more accurately address the complexity of older youths’ lives as students, future workers, and young parents themselves.

If we are to communicate the value of this approach to the broader universe of policymakers, parents, law enforcement and others, our community of advocates must develop a core set of messages (words, phrases and statements) that will resonate with these individuals and allow us to speak in a unified voice about youth transitions in this new way.

WHY TALKING ABOUT YOUTH TRANSITIONS?

The purpose of Talking About Youth Transitions is to give you concrete tools you can use to help you communicate about youth-transition issues in an effective and inclusive way.

Talking About Youth Transitions was produced by Fenton Communications, a firm that specializes in communications for the public interest sector, at the request of the Youth Transition Funders Group, a network of grant makers committed to ensuring that all young people between the ages of 14 and 24 become “Connected by 25” to caring adults, institutions and support systems that will enable them to succeed throughout adulthood. It grew out of extensive research in the field, which included:

- > A “perceptual survey” of both grant makers and field practitioners, so we understood how you saw challenges and the unique character of the issues;
- > An audit of how the news media cover issues related to youth at risk;
- > A review of previous Connect for Kids framing and messaging work;
- > A review of common language used by organizations dealing with the issues of youth transition; and
- > Our own analysis of current messaging around issues of youth transition.

Different states and organizations will have different policy agendas based on where they are and the different opportunities available in those states. By using common language to position our issues, together we will continue to build an understanding and commitment to older youth and to making sure they are connected by 25.

Audiences

Before deciding what to say, you have to be clear who you are speaking to and why. Identifying your audience, or audiences, should drive the content of your message and how you deliver it.

What *is* an audience? Here's one useful definition: *People who must take action for you to achieve your goals.*

What is an audience?
People who must take
action for you to
achieve your goals.

Other people may receive your messages or help you deliver a message, but they might not be your true targets, or be secondary targets.

Your target audiences should be identified as specifically as possible because this precision allows you to develop effective strategies to reach the people who matter most. That's why "the general public" is never an acceptable answer to the question "Who is your target audience?" Even "voters"—a group that may initially seem as overwhelming as "the general public"—can be identified quite accurately through voter registration rolls.

For most advocates in the field of youth transitions, three audiences are of the highest priority:

- > Policy-makers;
- > People who influence policy-makers; and
- > Members of the media who help you reach policy-makers.

Policy-makers are our most important audience. They are the people with their hands on the levers of power and are thus able to push for reforms. This group may be made up of:

- > National legislators;
- > State and local legislators;
- > Public providers and agencies; and
- > Private social service providers.

People who influence policy-makers are a second target audience. They are the people who, by themselves, can't make the changes you want but wield the kind of influence that can convince policy-makers one way or another. This group is made up of:

- > Law enforcement officials;
- > Business leaders;
- > Grantees and nonprofit leaders; and
- > Educators.

Members of the media are a special type of audience. They help you reach policy-makers and the people who most influence them. The media act as a conduit to deliver your messages to your target audiences. You have to carefully keep them in mind when considering your messengers, messages and overall positioning.

There might be other important target audiences to keep in mind when designing messages and your communications strategy. For example, many groups working in the field or as service deliverers must target individual financial contributors or grant-making foundations. Other groups are involved in social marketing and behavior modification, such as convincing young people to stay in school. In both cases, your target audience is the group of people you are trying to help and who must take action for you to reach your goals.

Again, the most important step is to clearly identify the target audience, including the action you want them to take. Then, specific messages can be emphasized or downplayed.

A final point about audiences: Keep in mind that your sets of messages, even though they may be tailored (or "segmented") for different target audiences, must remain in harmony. The goal of your communications should be to appeal to multiple target audiences with one message whenever possible. An article in the newspaper with your quote is likely to be read by people from multiple target audiences, not just one.

Messengers

Once you've identified who your target audiences are, think strategically about who is in the best and most persuasive position to deliver your messages to them. These people are your messengers.

When it comes to youth-transition issues, you should seek messengers who possess attributes that will compel your audiences to let down their guard a bit and be open to fully listening. These attributes are:

Power: When policy-makers are your targets, people wielding real power are your most effective messengers. This power can stem from their position in government, their claim to a constituency of voters or their contributions to a political action committee.

Examples: The chair of a state legislature's appropriations subcommittee with jurisdiction over funding for youth programs or the president of a membership organization with a number of supporters in the target policy-maker's district.

Humanity: People personally affected by the problems you are trying to solve can deliver your messages with a high level of authenticity and credibility. Their stories of growing up without the support of family or schools can speak to the heart as well as the mind. They may not be experts on the technical details of, say, a foster care reform bill, but that's not their job. The urgency of their real-life stories is what matters.

Example: A former foster care youth who benefited from a city program your organization wants to take statewide or a single parent without much outside support whose son has been caught up in the juvenile justice system.

Think strategically about who is in the best and most persuasive position to deliver your messages.

Knowledge: Facts and reason can come in handy, especially when you are delivering a message with complex implications for policy and budgets. Target audiences are receptive to messages delivered to them by people with credentials and knowledge.

Examples: A university professor and author of a peer-reviewed book on, say, racial disparities in the U.S. juvenile justice system or the program officer of a grant-making foundation who has a bird's eye view of the field.

Counter-intuitive: Sometimes, the best messengers possess none of these attributes, but are compelling precisely because their endorsement is unexpected. They trigger this reaction: "If this person is on board, then this must be a good idea!" This type of unexpected supporter can also help attract media attention.

Examples: A tough-minded city police chief critical of a state plan to build more jails instead of funding youth support programs or a small-government libertarian backing a school drop-out prevention program, despite the taxpayer price tag.

A final note: Don't assume that messengers you recruit to deliver your messages will necessarily stay focused on what you want them to say. To cover your bases, prepare the talking points you want them to stick to and emphasize which ones you absolutely want them to drive home, whether they're talking to a reporter or briefing policy-makers. Before an event or interview, offer to walk them through the messages and even role play if they are open to it.

Framing

In the words of UC Berkeley cognitive science professor George Lakoff, language is not neutral but framed. Few will admit to it, but the fact is people don't reach decisions based on facts alone. How your messages are framed and their emotional appeal in relation to people's deeply held values system can play a much more powerful role in their decision-making process—and in their willingness to hear what you have to say.

At the heart of every successful frame are values.

Framing is essential for defining the problem you are seeking to solve. If you allow others to define the problem—that is, frame it—in a way that is inaccurate or, at best, not advantageous to you, all the work in crafting your positioning and messages will be near useless.

By way of illustration, here are two frames on the same problem:

Frame 1: California's prison system is suffering from overcrowding.

Logical conclusion: Create space by building more prisons.

Frame 2: The rising number of offenders who are locked up and return to the streets—only to be arrested again—is a growing problem.

Logical conclusion: The lock 'em up strategy isn't working. We should look at other prevention strategies to reduce crime.

FAIRNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

At the heart of every successful frame are values. To set a frame, we have to zero in on the values around which we will build. These values will also inform the way we position and message youth-transition issues.

The values of “fairness” and “responsibility” are the most powerful and appropriate for youth-transition issues.

We propose that the values of “fairness” and “responsibility” are the most powerful and appropriate. That is, the problem revolves around *what’s fair*—to the youth unsupported by family, friends and schools—as well as *who’s responsible*.

It speaks equally to the situation faced by a young person who found himself, at no fault of his own, in an unsupportive foster care environment. Or a youth struggling for a diploma in a dysfunctional, even dangerous school. Or a young person caught in a riptide of run-ins with the law, leading to ever more serious offenses.

An appeal to fairness acknowledges that a shared responsibility exists and acknowledges the responsibility of society at large, as well, to provide equal opportunity (if not outcome) to every young person at the very start of adult life.

A fairness-and-responsibility framing of the problem could be articulated this way:

Most young people move successfully from adolescence to adulthood with the support of family, schools and community. But many others make the journey without any such support—those ageing out of foster care, leaving school before graduation or having run-ins with the law. They easily can fall off life’s edge, enduring years of dead-end jobs, jail, addiction or hopelessness.

It’s a frightening prospect these young people don’t deserve. Even those who made poor choices early in life shoulder only part of the blame. But it’s the country’s problem, too, and responsibility. Everyone stands to lose when these young people can’t fully participate as functioning parents, productive workers and fully engaged citizens.

OTHER KEY VALUES

Our research identified other key values we should keep in mind in positioning your issues and designing messages. These words will be echoed in the recommended positioning and messages.

- Justice / Equity (strongly associated with Fairness)
- Accountability (strongly associated with Responsibility)
- Effectiveness
- Community / Nurturing / Supportive
- Promise (of the kids)
- Foundation / Investment
- Connection / Engagement
- Interconnected / Holistic
- Alternatives / Multiple Pathways
- Prevention
- Partnership / Collaboration
- Empowerment / Respect

Positioning

Positioning describes the unique “space” that an organization, cause or product occupies in the mind of your target audience. It sets you apart from similar products or organizations, in part because it offers a comparison.

An example of effective positioning is Target, the discount retail chain. Its stores are not terribly different from Wal-Mart or any number of “big box” retailers. But through its advertising and savvy introduction of a few selected designer goods, it has successfully positioned itself apart from its competitors in the minds of most Americans as the hipper, with-it place to buy on a budget. Ask yourself: Do you know people who shop at Target, but wouldn’t be caught dead in Wal-Mart?

Another example, this time from the nonprofit world: Greenpeace and Sierra Club are both established, well-known national environmental organizations. While their policy agendas differ, they share many of the same positions. Yet one, Greenpeace, is positioned as audacious, youthful and edgy. Sierra Club is a bit more mainstream, with members more likely to write their member of Congress than risk arrest at a protest. These differences are rooted in reality, but the positioning helpfully amplifies it for audiences, so they are each easy to distinguish in the marketplace of social change organizations.

In our over-communicated, media-cluttered world, good positioning is one of the best ways to stay top-of-mind.

Your set of issues should have a unique position, too, in the minds of your target audiences. In our over-communicated, media-cluttered world, good positioning is one of the best ways to stay top-of-mind. So when you think of the group of youth transition issues, what sets it apart? And what does each of the issues within this group have in common? The answers can be captured by defining the unique character of the people you serve and the solutions you promote.

The young people that you are seeking to help:

Deserve a fair chance at life	Fairness, Justice, Equity
Face obstacles w/o support of family, schools & community	Unsupported, Disconnected
Attract less sympathy, interest from policy-makers & public	Invisible, Forgotten
Disproportionately come from communities of color	Discrimination, Racism
Disproportionately come from families who are poor	Class, Poverty

The solutions that you promote:

Cross traditional lines separating disciplines and funding	Interrelated, Comprehensive
Remain rooted in action by local communities	Community, Local
Assume shared responsibility among all parties	Responsibility, Accountability
Value long-term gains for communities	Investment, Promise

POSITIONING YOUTH TRANSITION ISSUES

Keeping these in mind, youth transitions issues (foster care, juvenile justice and graduation rates) should be positioned in people's minds as the issues that:

Concern the entire country. The number of young people facing obstacles on their way to adulthood has reached an alarming level, which drags down the economy and speaks volumes about the value we place on caring for society's most vulnerable.

Impact young people at a vulnerable time in their lives. Adolescence is a difficult period in a young person's life as it is, and the difficulty is greatly compounded by facing it without the support of family, friends and schools.

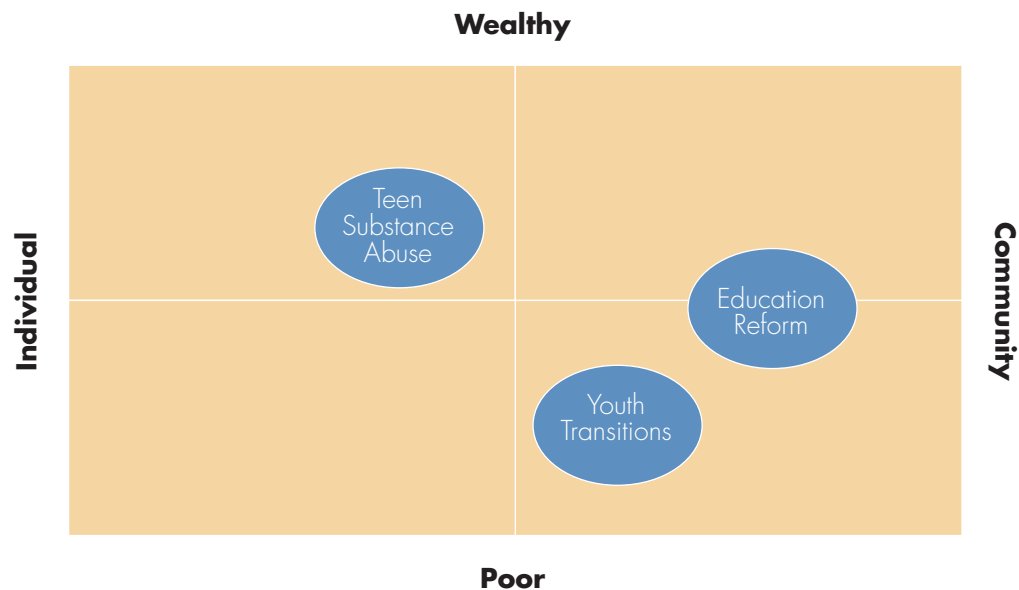
Affect families and communities over the long term. Unsupported youth who have children of their own often create additional pressures for communities that last for years.

Share root causes in discrimination and poverty. A disproportionate number of youth affected are black or Latino, or come from poorer families.

Impact the people who easily escape the public's attention. Youth transition issues are easy to ignore because, despite the grim statistics, many Americans tune out because they don't see how youth transition issues affect their own lives.

Is society's shared responsibility. Solutions require the work of youth and their communities together to succeed.

Positioning is more than identifying the attributes that make you different; you have to place yourself in relationship to competitors and peers. We might consider two other "issue groups" that affect young people in America: teen substance abuse and education reform and how they relate to youth transition issues in terms of two measurements of the young people, their economic status and their level of responsibility for the problem.



Charting out your position this way gives you a visual cue for how members of your target audience is fixing you in their mind.

Messages

Messages are the actual language used to describe your positioning, programs and attributes. The language from these messages should be used throughout all your communication vehicles, from your Web site, press releases, brochures and newsletters to speeches and media interviews.

What are messages for? Their purpose is to convince your target audiences to take the desired action.

Good messages should be:

- > Clarifying
- > Differentiating
- > Compelling
- > Memorable
- > Values-Based

Language must be both easily understood and elicit the right emotions in the hearts and minds of your target audiences. We communicate most effectively when we choose language that represents “shared values,” rather than trying to get key audiences to adopt values they see as coming from others. In all of your communications—from printed and online materials to meetings and interviews—think about the common values that will be shared by your target audiences (i.e., policy-makers) and the people they most care about (such as constituents and voters).

The first rule of effective messaging is clarity. This is why the words we choose are so important. Remember: Good communication cuts through the clutter; it certainly doesn't add to it. A good test is to ask yourself is: “How would a person outside my field talk about the subject?” Or, “How would I explain this issue to a 12-year-old?”

The first rule of
effective messaging
is clarity.

Another hint: Brevity may be the essence of wit, but it might not help others understand you. Contradictory as it may sound, sometimes saying something simply may require more words than fewer. Do it.

Below is a list of words, phrases and acronyms often used by people active on youth-transition issues that you should avoid, either because they represent jargon not clear to a person outside your field or because they carry social stigmas that the field wants to avoid. (They might not be entirely clear to a person inside the field, either, though this truth is not often acknowledged!) Also below are some suggested alternatives.

If you say...	Try instead...
Connected	Supported
Disconnected youth	Young people unsupported by family, school and community
Transitions	Turning points
Permanency	Rooted
At-risk youth	Young people at risk
Emancipation	Ageing out (foster care)
Juvenile (noun)	Youth / Young person / Adolescent
Recidivism	Return to jail / Lapse
NCLB	President Bush's No Child Left Behind law
OSY	Out-of-school youth / Young people not in school
AYP	Adequate yearly progress / Performance benchmarks

TELL A STORY

The best messages tell a story. When you weave a narrative together, you increase your chances of someone remembering what it is you want to communicate. The human brain is simply wired to respond to stories with a beginning, middle, end and characters they can relate to. As you tell your story, always be thinking about how your target audience fits and the role you want them to play. Can they be the hero?

Build a message in three parts:

- > Define the problem.
- > Offer the solution to the problem.
- > Issue a call to action.

The problem message helps to frame the issue for your audience by defining the challenges facing your community and why they should care in a way that speaks to their values. Your solution message echoes those values for the audience while describing how you intend to solve the problem. Finally, the call-to-action message tells your audience what you want them to do.

A narrative increases the chance someone will remember what you want to communicate.

Reporters build their news stories in the same way. By creating messages that follow this framework, you're not just making it easier to fit into their stories, you're giving journalists and others a compelling reason to cover your story.

Following is an articulation of that simple storyline in a problem-solution-action format:

Problem: Most young people move successfully from adolescence to adulthood with the support of family, schools and community. But for those ageing out of foster care, leaving school before graduation or having run-ins with the law, the lack of support can have disastrous consequences. They can easily fall off life's edge, enduring years of dead-end jobs, jail, addiction or hopelessness.

It's a frightening prospect that no young person deserves, and it's our problem and responsibility, too. Even those young people who might have made poor choices early in life shouldn't shoulder all of the blame. Everyone stands to lose when these young people can't fully participate as functioning parents, productive workers and fully engaged citizens.

Solution: Young people at risk need our help if they are to successfully move from adolescence to adulthood. Though they must take responsibility for their own success, society must do its fair share.

We should provide that support with reforms and public programs that:

- > Take a comprehensive approach, reflecting the interrelated nature of the problem;
- > Gather better data about young people at risk and the efforts underway to support them;
- > Embrace the common sense wisdom of local communities;
- > Avoid one-size-fits-all strategies and provide young people different routes to success;

- > Treat young people as young people, not adults;
- > Own up to disparities in our system today for people who are not white and not wealthy; and
- > Emphasize educational opportunities as the surest path to success in adult life.

Helping unsupported youth at major turning points on their way to adulthood is not only fair to them, but it's also doing right by society. Investing in young people today will repay society tenfold tomorrow by producing more productive workers, responsible parents and engaged citizens.

Action: You (policy-maker or program funder) should champion policies and fund programs that recognize all of the critical turning points in the lives of young people and help them move from adolescence to adulthood.

ADDITIONAL MESSAGES

Building on the dual framing themes of “fairness” and “responsibility,” following are additional messages in support of specific policies. They are offered as examples only, since youth advocates in different states have different policy agendas:

Young people deserve a fair chance to find their way to adulthood. But we have to realize that different kids may take different paths to get there. We should...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- > Monitor both four- and six-year graduation rates, giving schools and districts the flexibility to serve students that get off track to graduation.
- > Provide financial and policy incentives to increase the number of transfer schools and help students get their diploma.
- > Offer tuition waivers for foster-care students pursuing college.

Young people are exactly that: young. They sometimes act and appear as grownups, but they still can make the mistakes of children. We should share responsibility with them for making the move to adulthood...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- > By extending support for people in foster care beyond their 18th birthday.
- > Eliminate the transfer of juveniles to adult court and prisons.
- > Respond to disciplinary issues by addressing underlying issues and building their skills, rather than simply punishing or excluding them.

Young people should remain accountable when they stumble. But, to be fair, we in the community have to take our share of responsibility for offering a hand up and sending them down the right road to adulthood. It's important that we...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- > Assume joint responsibility of juvenile justice, child welfare and education to increase graduation rates of students in the public-care systems.

Although we have made enormous advancements, young people of color continue to be treated differently in schools, public services and by employers—and they often receive the least support. To be fair, we have to face an unpleasant truth: Race and class remain a common thread connecting the challenges in helping youth become productive members of the workforce and communities. As a society, we must...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- > Fund those programs and schools proven to be effective in helping young men of color.
- > Reduce the overrepresentation of young people of color in suspension and dropout populations.

Young people who are unsupported by family, schools and community benefit from stand-alone programs—but it's not enough. We have a responsibility to weave good programs into effective systems that support youth in multiple ways, such as...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- > Funding community-based programming and after care that includes education for court-involved youth.

Young people deserve to be set up for success, not failure. We should anticipate and prepare them for life after foster care, school or, for some, time in the justice system. It is only fair that we...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- > Make workforce-development funding available for students that are enrolled in alternative schools, have been in the juvenile justice system and are in foster care.

Young people without enough support from family and school face obstacles that combine to make the path to adulthood all the more difficult. That's why we need solutions that work together in ways that reflect the interrelated nature of what our youth are facing. For example, we should...

Bridge to policy recommendations:

- Focus on programs, such as improved data collection or broad education reforms that make an impact across all the issues facing unsupported youth in foster care, out of school or in the justice system.

MESSAGE ENHANCERS: FACTS & STORIES

People respond better to messages that appeal to their heart. Buttress whatever you say or write with compelling, real-life stories first, then back it up with cold, hard facts.

When telling stories, colorful details are important because they help your audience sit up and take notice. Details also serve as memory enhancers. Here is a short narrative of a real person designed to illustrate the interrelated nature of obstacles many young people face today:

James dropped out of high school when he was 17, soon after his family moved to a rough part of Philadelphia and he experienced a rocky transition to a new school. Caught up in the wrong crowd, he started taking drugs—and began selling them, too. When he stopped showing up for school, no one took notice. Before long, he was arrested. His future looked bleak...

To illustrate the success of one solution, alternative pathways to graduation, the story picks up here:

James later enrolled in a charter school tailored especially for high school dropouts to make up the credits he needed to graduate. Today, his dream is to start his own company purchasing and renovating houses for resale...

When including facts, take care to present the numbers in ways that people can quickly relate to. Instead of 90 percent, say “nine out of 10.” Or better still, use “social math” to translate a number to a narrative: “The dropout crisis has reached the point where a student leaves school in this country every nine seconds...” or “500,000 kids in foster care—more children than live in Nebraska, Maine or New Mexico—are waiting for necessary reforms.”

Remember, messages are not intended to be straight jackets for your communications work. If a specific goal requires you to amend or expand upon a message, do so—but just keep in mind both the long-view framing and positioning and the needs of the audiences you must convince to take action.

Part 2: Appendix

Outlets

NATIONAL TELEVISION

One in five Americans tunes in regularly to one of the three national network nightly news broadcasts. Though their viewership has been declining in recent years as consumer habits change, network news remains the Holy Grail of media coverage.

Most of the national broadcast networks—NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS—all have evening news shows (e.g. ABC's "World News Tonight") and prime-time magazine style news shows (e.g. CBS's "60 Minutes"). The commercial networks—NBC, ABC and CBS—also have morning news and talk shows (e.g. NBC's "The Today Show").

The national cable news channels—such as CNN, Fox News Channel and MSNBC—have to fill 24 hours a day with news, talk and other current events shows. Because they have more time to fill, cable news outlets are often more receptive than their network counterparts to a broader range of news stories and to intriguing angles on the hot issues of the day.

TIP: While all the big networks are in fierce ratings competition, it's even more vicious among the three morning shows (more on this below). To maintain good relationships with producers after they agree to do a story, ask if a story arrangement is an exclusive or if you're allowed to pursue the other programs.

TELEVISION TALK SHOWS

This is a rather broad category that includes everything from ABC's "Nightline" and Sunday morning network pundit shows like "Meet the Press" to more combative cable programming like "Hannity and Colmes." Gatekeepers and producers at these highly competitive shows tend to be hard to crack. You'll need a very compelling story.

TIP: Getting on TV is all about having a compelling story to tell, complete with unforgettable characters at the center. This means you can't just sell the "issue" in your pitch; you must be able to weave a traditional narrative (tragedy, conflict, hero and villain) and make a case for your spokespeople as a made-for-TV subject.

LOCAL TELEVISION

More Americans (nearly 60 percent) get their news from their local TV broadcasts than from any other news source, which makes them a must-hit if your target audience is middle America.

The majority of local stations are affiliated with national networks or national cable. For example, in the Bay Area, KGO-TV is affiliated with ABC, KPIX-TV is affiliated with CBS and KNTV-TV is affiliated with NBC.

Most local TV news stations produce and broadcast a morning, afternoon and evening news show. Because a typical evening broadcast lasts only 30 minutes, it is difficult to get in-depth coverage. An evening news segment can last as few as ten seconds but rarely lasts more than a minute. Morning shows will include more feature segments, including in-studio interviews. And some local TV stations will also have evening "magazine" style programs that include longer, feature stories, usually on softer, less deadline-oriented news.

TIP: Whenever you're talking to TV newsrooms, emphasize the visual element of your story up front to grab their attention and help them "see" a news segment. This includes describing your spokespeople with colorful detail and why they would make compelling subjects to interview.

NATIONAL BROADCAST RADIO

Radio is a great medium for reaching full-time workers, many of whom tune in during their commute times. The major national radio networks are National Public Radio (NPR), CNN, ABC, CBS and Westwood One. These outlets tend to have regular news updates and anchor-driven programming. The Associated Press, Bloomberg and Reuters also produce radio broadcasts with an emphasis on news, rather than radio personalities.

TIP: As with their peers in print, the big radio networks have offices in D.C. and New York. While many local radio stations are affiliated with the national outlets, it's still a good idea to pitch the national and local stations separately to cover your bases, especially if you have a story that has both a national and local angle.

LOCAL BROADCAST RADIO

Each media market is home to several local radio stations, not all of which have actual reporting staffs. Your priority stations should be the NPR affiliate and the all-news radio stations. Most stations feature nearly a dozen different shows and news broadcasts, providing many coverage opportunities. For example, KQED features "California Report" and "Forum," an hour-long call-in interview show, to name a few.

TIP: Talk radio is notorious for below-the-belt debate. Even if you're not on Rush Limbaugh's show, remember that radio hosts play up controversy and conflict to keep their listeners tuned in. Before you agree to do a segment, research the radio station and the specific show on the Internet and ask the producer what the show is like and who the audience is.

DAILY NEWSPAPERS

The top three national newspapers are *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times*. Other opinion-leading regional papers, such as *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times* and *Chicago Tribune* have the power to reach beyond their geographic region as well. At the local level, all but the smallest media markets have their own daily or weekly newspaper.

Most newspapers are divided into several sections:

- > **News:** Section "A" is typically reserved for the most important state or local news and national and international news. You will often find longer, investigative features here. Section "B" is reserved for local news and columnists.
- > **Editorial pages:** This section is where the newspaper replaces objectivity with opinion, including "editorials" (the official position of the paper on an issue), opinion pieces (submitted from the public), op-ed columnists and letters to the editor.
- > **Lifestyle pages:** This is where the "soft" news lives, and it can include everything from entertainment news to feature profiles on local celebrities, activists, performing arts groups or innovative social programs.
- > **Special interest sections:** While these may not seem immediately relevant to the YTFG, most major papers also run separate sections on different days of the week on health, science, religion, food, automotive, technology, etc.

WIRE SERVICES

Wire services are news sources that file articles to newspapers, radio and TV stations across the country. Media outlets subscribe to wire services, paying a fee to receive wire stories along with the right to reprint or broadcast these stories as part of their coverage. Getting covered by a wire service is important because one wire article might get picked up by hundreds of papers around the country.

The Associated Press (AP) is the largest wire service, with bureaus in almost every media market in the U.S. Other wires work like syndication services tied to specific newspaper groups, such as Gannett (*USA Today*), Knight-Ridder (*San Jose Mercury News*, *Miami Herald*), Copley (*San Diego Union-Tribune*), Cox News (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*), and Newhouse (*Oregonian*). For example, if a reporter from the *Oregonian* covers your story, the same article by that *Oregonian* writer could appear in other Newhouse papers, such as the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*.

TIP: If you strike out at one AP bureau, it doesn't mean the game is up. If it's a California story, for example, you may try the local bureau or the Bay Area bureau. If the story is relevant to national legislation, the D.C. bureau might also be worth contacting.

MAGAZINES

The number of magazines on the newsstands can be overwhelming. Look for the most appropriate for YTFG stories. General categories such as:

- > News: These include *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News & World Report* and *National Journal*. Harder nuts to crack because of their feature length formats are: *New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper's*.
- > General interest: Specifically, those magazines that feature "real life" stories of courage, tragedy, etc. Think *People*, *Reader's Digest*, but also *USA Weekend*, *Parade* and other Sunday supplements.

TIPS:

- > **Find the right reporter:** Unlike newspapers, magazines have fewer staff writers and even fewer writers assigned to specific beats. Many rely on freelancers for most of their copy. The exceptions are major news weeklies like *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*, which have more permanent staff assigned to certain beats. Remember that some magazines have their own columnists, too.

- > **Tailor your pitch to a specific section:** This is the number one tip magazine editors will tell you: Read the magazine first and pick a specific section to pitch to. Magazines are highly idiosyncratic when it comes to their table of contents. *Newsweek*, for example, runs pages called “Tip Sheets” for health and consumer-related news.
- > **Be aware of long lead time:** Monthly magazines can require three- to six-month lead times. In other words, if you’re planning to be in the May Mother’s Day issue, better start pitching as early as January or February. Most news weeklies come out on Monday and go into production the Wednesday before, usually with final deadlines on Friday.

INTERNET NEWS SOURCES

The number of people who say they get their news from the Internet at least once a week more than tripled in the past two years—from 11 to 36 million users. According to the latest national survey by Pew Research Center for the People and the Press on how Americans consume media, 35 percent of Americans go online for news at least once a week, and 48 percent say they “graze” the news, checking it from time to time over the course of the day.

From the convenience of their desk at home or at the office, people link to places like CNN.com, ABCNews.com and any other number of news outlets. Most “offline” news organizations have online counterparts and can even send members email updates on the day’s news. Slate and Salon.com are among an increasing number of online-only media outlets.

BLOGS

News blogs are amateur Web sites that offer regularly updated opinion, news and information and have been gaining credibility in recent years. It was a blog (thememoryhole.org) that first went public with the photos of coffins containing the bodies of soldiers killed in Iraq. And it was a handful of blogs (including talkingpointsmemo.org) that lit a fire under the story of Trent Lott’s nostalgic reference to Strom Thurmond’s segregationist leanings, a story the mainstream media first ignored and then picked up in response to the online furor. Within weeks, Lott was out as Senate majority leader.

Blogs are influential because they take advantage of the Internet format and of the fact that Americans increasingly like their news with a dose of opinion (think “The Daily Show” and Fox News, for that matter). Equally important, Washington insiders and members of the news media read blogs.

TIP: Keep in mind that blogs are only likely to respond to a whiff of controversy, a hot tip or if the mainstream news is legitimately ignoring a hot news story. Highly trafficked news blogs include: Wonkette.org and the controversial Drudgereport.org.

People

ASSIGNMENT EDITOR (BROADCAST AND PRINT)

The assignment editor is responsible for assigning stories to reporters. This is usually the best person to speak with when you don't have a specific reporter in mind or if your timeline is so short that you don't have time to shop your story around. Note for TV: If you are calling days in advance of your event, you can also ask for the **planning editor** whose job it is to sort and prioritize future stories.

BEAT REPORTER

A beat reporter focuses on one issue, such as education, politics or parenting. Beat reporters usually have some specialized knowledge of the subject they cover. Ask the reporter how much they know about the topic beforehand so you can best explain your position.

BOOKER (BROADCAST)

A booker is responsible for finding guests for TV and radio talk shows. While bookers mostly take a producer's direction for content, they are also able to put forth ideas and suggest guests.

BUREAU CHIEF / CORRESPONDENT

National media outlets have reporters stationed at bureaus across the country who cover regional news. For example, The New York Times has a correspondent in San Francisco who covers northern California for the national edition.

COLUMNIST

Newspaper columnists are often former reporters who have a weekly space to give their take on current events. While some write primarily first-person, human-interest stories, others prefer hard political commentary. There are three different categories of columnist: one-newspaper, syndicated and op-ed. Most columnists write exclusively for one newspaper, meaning their work doesn't appear in any other outlets. Syndicated columnists, such as George Will or Arianna Huffington, appear in hundreds of newspapers across the country. An op-ed columnist appears opposite the editorial page, typically writing about current or controversial events.

EDITORIAL BOARD EDITORS

Most daily newspapers have an editorial board made up of an editor and writers who determine which issues the newspaper will take a position on and what that opinion will be. The editorial board writer with the most expertise on an issue is usually dispatched to write the editorial.

FEATURES/LIFESTYLE REPORTER

All major newspapers have journalists who write features for their lifestyle/living sections. These tend to be longer pieces that go beyond relying simply on hard facts, with more opportunities to tell stories. Feature articles tend to draw out the personality of those interviewed and nuance of a given topic more than a daily news story.

PRODUCER (BROADCAST)

Television and radio shows all have producers who research stories, decide who to interview and do all the behind-the-scenes work to get a story on the air. Think Holly Hunter in "Broadcast News" or Al Pacino in "The Insider." Producers are ultimately responsible for determining which stories to cover.

REPORTER (BROADCAST)

Most TV and radio stations are too understaffed to assign specific beats and will typically send a general beat reporter to cover a news event. Be prepared to talk in sound bites if they approach you for an interview during the event. If they call by phone, feel free to press them on the angle of their story, how long you have to talk, if it is live and any other questions to help clarify the interview and make you more comfortable.

Terms

B-ROLL

B-roll refers to short, five- to 10-minute video packages made up of footage that can be used during a TV news broadcast with the news anchor's voiceover. B-roll can be useful for several reasons:

- > They create incentive for cash-strapped TV stations to cover your story if they don't have the resources to shoot original footage or lack archival footage of their own;
- > They can help you frame your story visually the way you want it told. This is especially important for advocates who are unhappy with the way mainstream media traditionally portray their issue; and
- > Unlike VNRs (see below), B-roll video streams are packaged with versatility so editors can slice and dice to suit their needs.

Except in rare instances involving footage that might be difficult to come by, do not expect national TV networks to use B-roll. They take professional pride in securing their own footage. Before you invest in B-roll, think about the value add you're providing. Is it of footage that newsrooms would otherwise not have easy access to? Is your goal to include sound bites from spokespeople that producers can blend into their segments? Production studios in major cities can shoot B-roll (a pre-determined list of shots, sound bites, or clips of archived footage) for between \$1,000 and \$8,000.

BYLINE

A byline refers to the name of the author of a news article. A good media relations hound will keep track of bylines on stories to assess whether a certain reporter will be receptive to a story based on previous articles. Be aware that sometimes newspapers and magazines will publish stories by freelancers who are not on staff.

EMBARGO

When you set an “embargo,” you are setting a specific time and date that you want the media to go public with your story. This is an industry standard that the media honor, although there is always an outside chance that an outlet will break your embargo anyway. That said, embargoes are extremely important because they buy you time to shop your story to the right reporter, and they give reporters time to prepare their stories in advance.

Once your news is made public, all embargoes are “broken,” and media can cover when they see fit. Keep in mind that, depending on when you set your embargo, either TV and radio OR print will get first dibs because of the nature of their production schedule. Ask yourself what kind of coverage is more important to you.

EXCLUSIVE

An exclusive is an agreement you make with one media outlet to run your story only with them on a particular day. Many outlets ask for an exclusive, but you should be highly selective in granting them. Here’s why: Exclusives limit you from even discussing your news with other competitive outlets, and those outlets might not want to cover your news after they see a competitor “scoop” them. Ask yourself if it’s more important to saturate the media market or more important to receive prominent placement in a target outlet.

A few exceptions: Sometimes a story is so hot that even if one outlet breaks it, others feel compelled to follow because they know their readers or viewers will want to know about it. You can also arrange to have different exclusives on the same day with outlets that do not compete directly, such as one TV, one newspaper and one radio station.

NEWS ADVISORY

A news advisory or media alert is used to inform media of your press event, news conference or upcoming announcement. It should not give away the heart of your news story but be substantive enough to tease reporters’ interest. Think of it as an invitation to an event. The advisory should explain who will discuss what news at your event. It should also include logistical information: time, date, address and cross street of your event; the names of speakers; and a sense of the visuals available for TV. Advisories should be one page long and should be distributed on your letterhead to news rooms two days before an event. For a sample news advisory, see appendix.

NEWS HOOK

Just because something is important doesn't mean it's newsworthy. Before you write a release or call a reporter, ask yourself what your news hook is. Is it the release of new data? A personality speaking publicly for the first time on an issue?

NEWS RELEASE

A news release announces your news story and is longer and richer in content than a news advisory. It is written in the past tense as though the event has already taken place. This document should feature the headline that you want to see in the newspaper, a concise intro paragraph (including the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* and *why*) followed by quotes from spokespeople and other pertinent facts you want the media to pick up on. You can pay to send a news release over a wire (see "wire service" below), or you can distribute it yourself at the press conference, or via email, fax, etc. For a sample news release, see appendix.

OP-EDS

Many people believe that op-eds stand for "opinion editorials," but they actually mean "opposite the editorial page." They are a chance for you to say in your own words what you feel about an issue. Check each paper for submission guidelines, but in general op-eds should be no longer than 600–650 words. Your chances of getting published increase if:

- > The op-ed is authored by a well-known figure or respected authority on the issue at hand;
- > The op-ed touches on a topic that is top-of-mind in the current news cycle;
- > You strike while the iron is hot. If you submit an op-ed weeks after your issue was front-page news, you're too late.
- > The paper has editorialized against your position and is seeking to balance representation.

PITCHING

Pitching is the process of calling journalists and convincing them to cover your story. Before calling any reporter, make sure you're able to articulate why your story qualifies as news and deserves coverage. What is new or unique about your information? Who are the players involved, and how does your news affect their audiences? Everyone in a newsroom is very busy, so practice a short, concise and exciting pitch before you make the call. Reporters receive dozens of calls and hundreds of emails every day by other would-be newsmakers.

SOUND BITE

Typically only 10–15 seconds, a sound bite is a memorable way to get your point across either through punchy language, a clever analogy or social math (“the number of young people in America who do not complete high school each year could fill Dodger stadium”). Always have your sound bites ready before a media interview.

TAPE-TO-LIVE

When you are interviewed by radio or television, it is important to ask if it will be live, taped or tape-to-live. The first two are fairly self-explanatory and should help you prepare for how careful you will need to be with your words. “Tape-to-live” means that they will tape the interview for a future segment but that they will not edit it at all. So, any mistakes or misquotes will air as if you are live in the studio.

VNR

A VNR or “Video News Release” is a narrative video package designed to tell your story to TV producers. It often involves a script and director and is much more elaborate and labor intensive than producing B-roll. VNR is especially useful if your issue is complicated and multi-dimensional and you feel you need to walk your audiences through it. It can include voice-over, graphics and animation, high-production shots, etc. Occasionally a TV station will run a VNR as is, but this is unlikely as it’s frowned upon as too much spoon-feeding. VNRs can be expensive (\$15,000–35,000).

WIRE SERVICE

The Associated Press is a wire service. But wire services also refer to services such as PR Newswire, BusinessWire, Ascribe and USWire that you can pay to have your news release distributed through their networks, which often go directly into the newsroom to targeted beat reporters and into news search databanks like LexisNexis. Posting releases with these private wire service companies can be as little as \$50 to \$500–\$2,000, depending on the number of words in your release and the breadth of distribution.

Interviews

Even for a seasoned pro, media interviews can be intimidating. But they are also great opportunities to get your message across. If you prepare for your interview and understand the rules of the game, you can minimize the pitfalls and even learn to enjoy the spotlight! Below you will find advice on connecting with your audience and our “5 C’s” for surviving and thriving during your media interviews. The main thing to remember: Be yourself and let your feelings and ideas show.

FIVE C’S:

1. **Connect with your audiences**
2. **Come prepared**
3. **Consistently stay on message**
4. **Concisely deliver your message**
5. **Control the conversation and your quotes**

Connecting with your audiences

Who is the audience? What do they believe? What are their values?

How should you adjust messages for these different audiences?

What do you need to emphasize for different audiences?

Remember: It is easier to motivate someone around something they already believe than to convince them of something new.

People are motivated to act based on emotions, not facts.

Come prepared

Develop your “angle” and its messaging

Translate messages into shorter sound bites

Compile talking points to defend this angle

Make a list of 2–3 positives to mention throughout

Prepare a couple of personal stories or actual examples to weave into your remarks. These are far more persuasive and memorable than any statistic.

Identify negatives and tough questions (what they will ask, what they could ask and what you should avoid)

Recognize possible interruptions, distractions (traffic, people walking behind you, etc.)

Never shoot from the hip

Visualize the results

Consistently stay on message

Most people will need to hear your message several times before they will remember it. As the sample below shows, you don't have to use the exact same words, but if you want the audience to agree with you, you have to stay on message—no matter what question a reporter asks you.

Repeat

INTERVIEWER: Why are you here?

YOU: "I am here because legislators have failed to understand that solving issues of youth transition requires coordinated efforts by government agencies, and Congress has the opportunity to make this happen by passing ..."

Repeat again:

INTERVIEWER: Isn't juvenile justice a vastly different issue than foster care?

YOU: "Those issues, along with the issue of school completion, are inextricably tied. So, solving issues of youth transition requires coordinated efforts by government agencies, and Congress has the opportunity to make this happen by passing ..."

Concisely deliver your message

The most common mistake people make in media interviews is speaking too long. Make your point and stop talking.

Listen.

Respond: What key points should you make and in what order?

Expand: Give 1–2 points as background only if necessary.

Stop.

Control the interview

The interviewer might take you in a direction you don't want to go. You can bridge back to your main points by acknowledging the question quickly, but steering the conversation back to your key messages.

INTERVIEWER: Shouldn't graduation rates be dealt with at the individual school level?

YOU: "While reversing declining graduation rates is the work of everyone, we're here on the Capitol steps today because we feel the state assembly has an opportunity help every school in the state, by passing the Every Child A Diploma bill..."

Flag: Signal the importance of a particular point you want to get across so journalists know which clips to use when they edit or produce their final stories.

- > "Here is what every parent going through a divorce needs to know ..."
- > "The most important thing to remember is ..."
- > "The bottom line is ..."

MORE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS: GENERAL

Be prepared. Before an interview, set aside a few minutes to think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Have a friend or colleague ask questions and rehearse your answers out loud. Outline—in your head or on paper—three key messages prior to the interview and then "bridge" each answer back to one of these.

Tailor what you say to your audience. Are you talking to a TV reporter who wants a speedy sound bite or a feature writer who's interested in an in-depth story? Is the audience local or national? Tailor what you say accordingly.

Select only a few messages to support your point. Because your subject area is so large and has many facets, isolate the aspects and points you think are most important and have them ready to support your arguments repeatedly.

Reiterate your main point clearly. Make sure you articulate your main message clearly and are not afraid to say it again and again. The more times you get your key point across, the more people will remember it.

Use specifics and examples to bring the issue to life. Reporters want to interview you because of your unique experience. Color what you say with real-life anecdotes, statistics and observations.

Take your time. Don't rush into answering questions you feel uncomfortable with. If a reporter asks for an interview and you aren't ready to talk, ask for a few moments to prepare. Ask how soon they need to interview you and respond before then. During the interview, speak slowly and ask for clarification when needed.

Don't get trapped into talking about things you don't know. If you don't know the answer to a question, bring it back to something you do know. Bridge back to your key messages but don't appear evasive. Also, don't be afraid to tell the reporter that you don't know the answer to a question but will happily find out and get back to them.

Get to know the reporter. Reporters are human, too, and how a story turns out is as much about the interviewer as the interviewee. Ask the reporter about the story's focus and what they plan to ask you. And, with caution, treat the reporter like a human being. Just beware at all times that you are "on record" — and don't let your comfort level allow you to get off message.

You never have to answer reporters' questions directly. Decide in advance what you want to communicate and steer the conversation back to those points. Remember, they can only quote what you actually say. And if you're thrown by a question, you can respond with, "You know, I think the real question here is ..."

MORE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS: PRINT

Prepare your key messages and talking points before the interview. Preparing messages and talking points will help you control the message and prevent a reporter from misquoting you.

Never "wing it." If a reporter calls you, never agree to an interview right at that moment. You need to give yourself time to develop your talking points. Ask the reporter the nature of the interview, the other people she will be interviewing for her story and when her deadline is. Then set up an interview time later in the day but with plenty of time to make the deadline. If someone else sets up your interviews, they should ask the same questions and give you enough time to prepare.

Know your media outlet and journalist. Get familiar with the newspaper or magazine with which you'll be interviewing. What is its political slant? Who is its readership? Do some research and read a couple of articles written by the reporter with whom you'll be speaking. Is this a column that's likely to be heavy on opinion or is it a news article, which is likely to be more fact-driven. Is the reporter sympathetic to your cause? Is she liberal? Conservative?

Role-play with one of your colleagues prior to your interview. The role-play should anticipate the types of questions the reporter is likely to ask.

Use cheat sheets. If you are interviewing over the phone, print out any “cheat sheets” that you need for reference. The beauty of phone interviews is that the reporter can’t see you, so you can use notes to help you make your points.

Speak in sound bites—or short, pithy, attention-grabbing quotes that communicate the gist of your message. If you want to make sure you are quoted accurately, repeat your message a few different times. Print reporters, especially those working for dailies, have no time to transcribe an interview from a tape recorder. They spend most of their time looking for colorful sound bites. It’s your job to make sure you repeat your message throughout the interview, and deliver your message through colorful sound bites.

Speak to your audience: Remember that the person you are communicating with isn’t the reporter, but the people who will read her story the next day. Think about the readers while you’re delivering your sound bites and messages.

Bridge back to key points. If a reporter asks you a detailed, multi-part question, focus on answering the one question that leads you back to your key messages. You never have to answer a question directly. Bridge back to your messages with a bridging statement like, “The single most important thing to remember is...”

DO slow down if you’re delivering one of your sound bites and especially if you hear a reporter typing on the other end of the phone. Let the reporter catch up. You may decide to repeat the exact quote again.

DO strive to appear more reasonable than your opponents.

DON’T use sarcasm; it doesn’t translate well in the media, especially in print.

DON’T use jargon, acronyms or insider vocabulary.

DON’T overwhelm a reporter with too many numbers or statistics. Key findings are good if they help define the story, but to languish in numbers bores anyone who might be reading the story.

DON’T say “no comment.” It sounds like you have something to hide. It’s better to tell a reporter that you don’t know the answer or that you’re unclear about the answer based on your current understanding of the information.

DO assume everything you say is on the record unless you have a very specific agreement otherwise. Just because the pencil has been put away doesn't mean that the reporter might not use something you say on the way to the door.

MORE TIPS FOR INTERVIEWS: TELEVISION

Develop your key messages and know how to deliver them effectively prior to your interview. To get a sense of the host's style and show's format, watch the show before you go on. What's the format of the show? Live? Live-to-tape? Call-in? One-on-one interview? Debate? Is it liberal? Conservative? What other guests have been booked? What point-of-view are you expected to fill? Is the host impartial? Is she combative? Does she use her questions as a way to ambush her guests?

Watch the show several times before your appearance, if possible. If you can't, milk the producer for as much information as possible before you agree to do the show. Look for transcripts on their Web site.

Role-play with one of your colleagues prior to your interview. The role-play should mimic the show in length and style.

Always choose an in-studio interview over a satellite interview. You'll have a better opportunity to establish a rapport with the host—which will strengthen your appearance.

Analyze your interview afterward. One of the best ways to hone and improve your performance before the camera is to watch a replay of your interview and look for places where you faltered or soared.

DO make eye contact with the host. When interviewing in studio, don't look at the camera, make eye contact with the host.

DO smile! It will help you to relax; it will project confidence and will help to win over your audience. If the host is combative, don't be afraid to sit closer and touch her arm and smile—it will make it harder for her to be nasty to you. If she's got you on the defensive, interrupt her, but do it with a smile. Keep interrupting to repeat your messages. As long as you keep a smile on your face, you won't seem rude.

DON'T be fooled by a host who is as sweet as sugar before the show begins; she might turn into an attack dog as soon as the show goes live.

DON'T be distracted by the stage crew.

DO refer to the show or the host by name—it's always a sign of a seasoned pro.

DO assume that everything is being recorded, so don't make any off-the-cuff remarks.

DO use natural hand gestures that don't distract.

DO remember that every "um" and twitch is magnified, so relax, breathe and ground yourself.

DON'T move until the producer or host tells you that you the interview is over.

Via Satellite:

DO make sure the audio earpiece fits properly. Alert the producer or technician immediately if it doesn't stay in your ear or if sound is cutting in and out.

DO be conversational and engaging. If your opponent is in-studio and you're via satellite, you are at a disadvantage. To even the playing field, be conversational, smile and interrupt if needed.

DO maintain eye contact. Although it may feel awkward, always maintain eye contact with the camera in satellite interviews; otherwise you will appear shifty-eyed, and it will distract viewers from your message.

Your Message:

DO get out your key messages in your first answer — you may only get that one opportunity.

DO repeat your messages as often as possible.

DON'T get flustered — stay calm and on message, no matter what happens.

DO stop and start over if you make a mistake during a taped interview.

DO focus on answering the one question that leads you back to your key messages if a host asks you a detailed, multi-part question.

DON'T use sarcasm; it doesn't translate well on TV—or in other media for that matter.

Speaking:

DON'T speak too rapidly; in fact, speak more slowly than usual. It will be the perfect speed for TV.

DO use appropriate vocal variation. To avoid sounding monotone, try punching, or emphasizing, one word or phrase in each sentence.

What to wear:

DO wear grays, blues and browns.

DO wear pastel shades for shirts/blouses.

DON'T wear white—it glows on TV; don't wear black—it's too harsh and sucks up all the light.

DON'T wear big jewelry, especially dangly earrings. Do not wear buttons or slogans—no one will be able to read the slogan, and it will just come across as tacky.

DO wear glare-proof glasses. If you wear glasses most of the time, then wear your glasses, however, you may want to get glare-proof glasses.

DO wear makeup. Even if you don't normally perspire, you will on TV because of the hot lights. Makeup will make you look like you're not sweating. Ask the production crew for help if you don't normally wear makeup.

MORE INTERVIEW TIPS: RADIO**Preparation:**

Listen to the show first to get a sense of the host's style. What's the format of the show? Live? Call-in? One-on-one interview? Debate? Is it liberal? Conservative? If you don't have time to listen or you're outside the media market, do some research online.

Practice beforehand. Before the interview, practice by taping yourself and listening to hear what works, such as voice inflection and speech cadence.

Research the opposition. If it is a debate show, find out who the other guests are and do research on their positions so you'll be better prepared to respond to their views.

Use “cheat sheets” for reference. The beauty of radio is that nobody can see you, so you can use notes to help you make your points.

Be present in the studio. If you have the choice between interviewing by phone or in the studio, do it in the studio because the quality of the interview will be better, you’ll be less likely to be cut off in mid-sentence, and you’ll have an opportunity to establish a rapport with the host.

Tape the show. On the day of the show, set your tape recorder to record the show or bring a blank tape to the studio and ask for an “air-check” (they will record the show for you). You can listen to the tape later to analyze your performance and improve for next time.

Tell supporters to tune in. For call-in shows, notify supporters, friends and co-workers about the program, so that they can call in with supportive questions and comments. It’s also great PR for your organization!

In the Studio:

DO compliment the producer and the host. Make it clear that you are happy to stay as long as the host wants and you are happy come back on subsequent shows.

DO ask the producer what the best position is for you in relation to the microphone.

DON’T get up to leave before the host or producer says you are done.

DO ask the producer what the best position is for you in relation to the microphone.

DO maintain eye contact with the host or the engineer while you are on air, so that you can time your comments. Don’t lose an opportunity to make a strong closing point because you’re out of time.

DO reference the listener call-in person’s name when you respond to his question. This is an excellent way to establish a rapport with the listener and your audience.

DO refer to the station’s call letters, the show or the host by name—it’s always a sign of a seasoned pro.

DO assume that everything is being recorded, so don’t make any off-the-cuff remarks.

On the Phone:

DO call from a land line, not a mobile phone or a cordless phone.

DO disable call waiting.

DO have the phone number of the studio on hand in case you get cut off.

DON'T leave your radio on. Turn off your radio completely or you'll experience feedback.

DON'T talk and drive. If you must use a cell phone and you're calling from a car, pull over and park — both for safety reasons and to help you concentrate on your message.

Your Message:

DO get out your key messages in your first answer—you may only get that one opportunity.

DON'T get flustered. No matter what happens, stay calm and on message.

DO treat the host and listeners, even those hostile to you, with respect. This will usually disarm their hostility. If hostility continues, "I'm sorry you feel that way," will often win you points from the audience.

DO repeat your messages. Radio audiences change every 15 minutes; if you are on a one-hour show, repeat your messages often to cover your bases.

DON'T use sarcasm; it doesn't translate well on radio—or in other media for that matter.

DO mention your organization or campaign by name, saying it at least twice. Don't use the acronym of your organization, say your organization's full name and Web site. Don't count on the host to mention it for you.

Speaking:

DON'T speak too rapidly; in fact, speak more slowly than usual. It will be the perfect speed for radio.

DON'T pop your "Ps" or smack your lips into the microphone.

DO smile, it will actually “show” in your voice.

DO ask the production staff for water and drink periodically during the show (away from the microphone).

DO speak in short sentences and pepper your remarks with sound bites.

DO use appropriate vocal variation. To avoid sounding monotone, try punching, or emphasizing, one word or phrase in each sentence.

DO use humor as appropriate, but only if it comes naturally to you.

DO stand if possible, instead of sitting. It will give your voice more energy.

DO be clear and repeat yourself if you’re giving out a Web site or a phone number. If the phone number spells something out, take advantage of it because it will be easier to remember.

Coverage

NEWS CONFERENCE

You should only hold media events, or news conferences, when you are certain the event is newsworthy and if you feel you have something visually compelling to offer (such as high-demand spokespeople). The best time is mid-morning between Tuesday–Thursday. This will give you enough time to pitch in advance without running directly into the weekend and will give you good placement on days when people are more likely to consume the news. A news conference should last no longer than 45 minutes with each speaker speaking for no longer than three to five minutes. For more information on how to hold a successful event, see page 36.

TELEPHONE NEWS CONFERENCE OR BRIEFING

If you have news to release that you think will attract reporters from around the country, a telephone news conference is the best way to go because reporters can take part no matter what time zone they're in. Conference call services are sophisticated enough now that you can actually ask for the following news conference-friendly features:

- > A mechanism to silence reporters while speakers talk
- > A screening mechanism so you can control which reporters ask questions
- > Transparency so you know which reporters are on the line and which have left
- > Transcripts of the call and questions, as well as a recording for media to call in later to listen to if they could not make the original call

EDITORIAL BOARD MEETING

Editorial boards carry significant weight in shaping the public opinion, not the least because policy-makers and their aides take them very seriously. Given YTFG's potential legislative goals, editorial board meetings can be an important strategy to educate the broader public and influence decision makers. These meetings usually need to be scheduled one to two weeks in advance.

OP-ED AND LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Op-eds and letters to the editor (LTEs) give you an unmediated space to get your message across. Nearly all LTEs are published in response to stories that have run in earlier editions. With op-eds, you'll have more leeway to introduce topics that aren't necessarily making headlines. That said, your op-ed is more likely to be published if it taps into the immediate news zeitgeist. Check the paper's Web site for length and submission requirements.

TV AND RADIO TALK SHOWS

If a news story is hot enough, the topic might be picked up by TV and radio talk shows. When a request comes in, or when you proactively secure an interview, be sure to ask the length of the interview, what the show wants you to communicate and whether there will be other guests in the segment. Also be sure to get the name of the producer so you can begin building a relationship.

PAID ADVERTISING

Paid advertising, whether it's a full-page ad in *The New York Times* or a series of television spots, can be costly but effective. Ads give you an unmediated line of communication with your audience and they can also boost your campaign by communicating to decision makers and reporters that you mean business. Given the seconds-long window of opportunity you have to grab people's attention before they turn the page or click the remote, it's worth investing in professionals to help draft the most eye-catching and provocative ad that you can. Advertising and communications professionals can also give you advice on how to get the most bang for your ad buy buck, and help you negotiate the best rates.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

A public service announcement, or PSA, is a short, 15- to 30-second spot about your cause that media outlets agree to air for free. While the price is right, there are several catches to going to the PSA route, not the least of which is that you can't control when your spot airs. If you've ever suffered from insomnia and watched TV, you've probably found the graveyard where many PSAs end up: in the early hours of the morning when broadcasters have difficulty selling ad time because advertisers know their key demographic isn't watching. Chances are yours won't be either.

Pitching

WHO TO PITCH

Your first contact should be someone you or a YTFG member or grantee already knows or someone who has covered your issue in the past. Pitch this person first and ask for advice on who else to pitch to if he or she takes a pass. If you don't have any contacts, you may try looking through the paper and making an educated guess at who is most likely to be receptive to your story based on the type of coverage.

WHEN TO PITCH YOUR STORY

Typically, you want to pitch your news between 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m., two to three days in advance of your news. Always follow up with a newsroom or reporter the morning of an event to confirm attendance.

HOW TO PITCH YOUR STORY

Think it through first: Always take time before pitching to think through what is newsworthy about your story and how to express it succinctly. This will help you convince a reporter or assignment editor to cover your story in the 30 seconds you have to capture their interest.

Translate your issue for real people: YTFG knows a lot about the issues facing our youth, but the media and their audiences may not. Use language and examples that everyone is familiar with and you will be more convincing.

Talk with, not at: Be friendly and professional, but, most importantly, do not talk AT a reporter. Nothing's worse than sounding like a telemarketer reading his script. Be conversational in your pitch: Pause to ask if the reporter has heard of what you're talking about, give her time to ask you a question.

Start from square one: Never start a pitch with, “I am calling to make sure you got our news release.” A more engaging opener is, “I’m calling to let you know about a new report with some alarming information on the academic success of kids in foster care.”

No’s can lead to a yes: If you get a “no” from one reporter, try pitching another, adapting your pitch accordingly to the reporter’s interest.

EDITORIALS

Unlike newspaper articles, editorials represent a newspaper’s unambiguous opinion, as determined by the newspaper’s governing body of editorial writers and editors. The public and policymakers generally take a local newspaper’s editorial opinion seriously and look to the editorial page for insight into the biggest issues of the day. As such, garnering a favorable editorial is a great way to clearly frame the debate on your issue and “move the needle”—or increase public and political support—for your campaigns. Here are some tips to help you win editorial support from newspapers:

Do your research. Review the paper’s stance and coverage on your issue first. If you don’t subscribe to the paper, most newspapers allow you to read their recent editorials on their Web site. The editorial board will appreciate your familiarity, knowledge and ability to discuss angles that haven’t been covered yet. Don’t waste time on newspapers that are ideologically opposed to your issue. Most newspapers will keep archived copies of editorials posted on their Web sites for at least two weeks.

Target the right paper and writer. Most editorial boards have one head editor and a handful of writers, each focusing on issues like the environment, health and foreign policy. If you don’t know whom to contact, call up the editorial assistant and ask. Who is the editorial assistant? Read on...

Get to know the gatekeeper. The editorial board and some individual writers have assistants. Introduce yourself and get as much information as you can about the best way to approach their bosses. Use this conversation to gauge whether your issue fits into the range of issues on which this newspaper will editorialize.

Pitch:

Practice the pitch. Before you make your first call, know how to make the case for your issue, but even more importantly, make the case for why an editorial is important sooner rather than later. And before your team meets with the editorial board, practice your respective parts, including who says what and how long each person will talk (no more than 3–5 minutes per person depending on the size of your group).

Make the pitch call. It's often the case that editorial boards have no time for a face-to-face meeting. You should always be prepared to make your case during your pitch call; follow up with your written pitch.

Send a formal pitch letter. This 1–2 page letter should clearly state the editorial position you want the board to take and answer key questions that an editorial writer will ask:

- > Why is this issue important and why now?
- > How does this issue affect our readers?
- > Who are the actors involved in this debate?
- > Why is your position the right one to take?
- > Why is the opposition wrong? (This doesn't mean that you have to repeat their arguments!)

Provide persuasive documentation to bolster your arguments. In addition to your pitch letter, be prepared to send a few articles about your issue and other favorable editorials. Also offer some credibly documented and footnoted information. A report by a well-respected institute will work, as will an analysis from a legislative policy committee (a synopsis of either is preferable to a thick volume). If your organization has produced a report, this is also an opportunity to set yourself up as a respected authority on this issue. But be prepared to defend your data and analysis.

Be persistent. Follow up by phone to suggest meeting dates and send additional background information by mail with a personal note. It often takes several months to secure editorial meetings and several more before they take a stance on your issue. And remember, newspapers will often editorialize in support of your issue even without a meeting.

Meet:

Pick the best team. Pull together three or four strategic individuals to attend the editorial board meeting—and no more. A good combination: the figurehead, the wonk and the stakeholder. The figurehead, or an executive director of an organization, can give the overview of the what, who, when and how behind the issue and why it deserves attention. The wonk—a researcher or policy analyst—can answer the more technical questions. And the stakeholder—a person who is impacted directly by the issue—puts a face on an abstract problem. You can also bolster your team with the strange bedfellow—the person whom pundits would not expect to endorse your position, demonstrating the breadth of your support.

Thank them for coverage, if appropriate—not for helping your position, but for informing their readers about the issue. Newspapers usually make a point of creating a firewall between their editorial department and their newsroom so that their regular news remains neutral. As such, you should steer clear of any comments that suggest that their editorial position is linked to their news reporting on the issue.

Expect to be grilled. If they're tough on you—and they will be—remember it's their job to play devil's advocate. They want to hear you defend your position so they'll have ammunition if they decide to agree with you. Don't be defensive and be prepared to hold your ground.

Cut to the chase. Often, you'll only get 30–45 minutes of their time, so cover the main points right away. Make sure they're asking questions within 10 minutes into the meeting so you have a conversation, rather than a lecture. That said, it's a good idea to take the pulse of the room to clarify how much background to give depending on how up to speed on the issue the editorial board members are. Don't sidestep the sticky parts; address potential concerns upfront. And always try to appear more reasonable than your opponents.

Give them a timeline. Editorials are all about timing. A timeline will give them a full sense of the debate and relevant upcoming events that might influence public opinion on the issue, such as a news item or piece of legislation. This will help them to think about when to place future stories or editorials.

Close the deal. Before you leave, clarify what you're asking for and what you would like them to say in their editorial. Press them to say which position they intend to take based on the meeting.

Respond:

Say thank you. Don't wait for a positive editorial to appear before sending a letter thanking them for taking the time to meet with you. If they publish a favorable editorial, thank them for their support as well.

Include new information and address specific issues that they might have raised during the meeting that perhaps you were unable to respond to fluently at the time.

Ask to submit an op-ed if at any point in the process they say they will not editorialize on your issue or if they end up editorializing against you. An op-ed is second best to an editorial, but it nonetheless allows you to use the opinion-editorial page to frame your issue and move the needle.

Write letters to the editor. You (and your supporters) should plan to do this regardless of the editorial position the board takes. If the newspaper's editorial is supportive, letters to the editor can keep your positive story alive a few days longer on the editorial page. If they write against you, letters help reframe the debate from your perspective. And remember, good letters to the editor don't repeat the messages of the opposition but respond with your own key messages.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the Editor—also known as LTEs—represent an excellent opportunity to communicate (or repeat) the key messages of a campaign, especially following a related article or editorial.

The LTE section is a very popular part of the newspaper. Policymakers often consider the LTE section the “voice of the community.” As such, they are particularly attuned to the viewpoints expressed here. If your opposition dominates this section, it will allow them to position their opinion as the prevailing point of view.

To maximize the likelihood that your letter gets printed, follow these important guidelines:

Timing is Everything: To prevent the opposition from gaining an upper hand, your campaign communications plan should include a proactive LTE-writing effort. It’s important to have LTEs ready to send out the same day that an article or editorial on your issue appears. If you wait to start writing your letter after the opposition has had its letters published, you are too late. By developing a set of LTE boilerplates for your campaign, you can be ready whenever a relevant story appears. Since every letter should reiterate the key messages of your campaign, a boilerplate LTE should only require minor editing to make it relevant to a particular article or editorial. You might even set up email action alerts to your supporters to make them aware of new articles or editorials. Sending many LTEs will increase the likelihood that at least one gets printed.

Short is Sweet: Resist the temptation to write a two-page screed. Your LTE has to be short, punchy and to the point. LTE editors will always choose a short, pithy letter over a lengthy, rambling treatise. Focus on keeping your letter to 100–150 words. Use the “Word Count” function on your word-processing program to get a definitive answer on your LTE length. For example, this paragraph is already 68 words long.

Short Sentences, Short Paragraphs: If you write like a journalist—short sentences and short paragraphs—editors will be more likely to choose your letter. Pick up any newspaper and you’ll notice that most paragraphs are about two sentences long—sometimes only one sentence. Long paragraphs create a psychological barrier, sending a message to the reader’s brain: “Don’t read this: It’s way too long!”

Communicate Key Messages: Use every opportunity—meaning every sentence—to communicate your message. Ultimately, the LTE editor has final say over which of your sentences stay and which of them go. Don’t risk the chance that your key message will be left on the editing room floor. Make sure every sentence moves your message.

Don't Repeat Your Opponent's Message: Use your letter to respond with your key messages rather than to react to the messages of the opposition. If you repeat the messages—or language—of the opposition, you are giving that voice one more opportunity to be heard. An LTE that begins, “Affirmative action is not reverse discrimination,” will reinforce that affirmative action is exactly about reverse discrimination. You wouldn't give your opponents money to run a commercial against you; don't give them a soapbox in your LTE. Protocol requires that your opening sentence refer to the article or editorial you are responding to (“The debate about affirmative action (news article, Oct. 10) is not about ...”), but you certainly shouldn't repeat all the arguments.

Make it Personal: Personal stories beat out statistics nine times out of 10. That is why Americans rush to movie theatres and not to college statistics courses. Our inclination is to use statistics to bolster our argument because we assume that readers will make decisions based on facts. Unfortunately, that is not the case. People make decisions based on emotions and values. And the best way to communicate values and emotions is by telling a (short!) personal story.

You might also ask yourself if you're the best person to author an LTE. Perhaps there are better “messengers” who can connect with readers through their personal stories or what they represent. Often, everyday citizens offer a more compelling voice for your position than an executive or high-profile name.

Include Your Full Name, City, Phone Number: Your LTE should always end with your complete name, city of residence and telephone number. Your number will not be published, of course, but many papers will call to verify that you actually wrote the letter. If you are writing a letter on behalf of your organization, you should also list your organizational title, organization name and the city where the organization is located (rather than your personal city of residence).

Send by Email if Possible: Although newspapers usually accept letters by fax and snail mail, many editors prefer email. Why? Because it means the difference between an editor spending five to ten seconds (if even that) to cut and paste your letter versus five to ten minutes retyping your letter. Email also allows for a faster turnaround than snail mail. When sending by email, cut and paste your letter into the body of an email. Don't send attachments.

Events

PLANNING

Timing is everything: To make sure that you give reporters enough time to file their stories, hold an event at 11 a.m. at the latest. If your event will draw East Coast reporters as well, shoot for 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. Pacific Time.

Location, location, location: Remember that reporters and TV camera crews are often dashing from story to story. Your press event should be held in a familiar, centralized location no more than a half-hour drive from downtown.

The space: Some possible venues to consider include union halls, art galleries, community centers or conference space at your local library. Some restaurants may also offer their space for free if you pay them to provide beverages and snacks for the press. While hotel conference rooms are popular for press events, they can cost \$100–\$300.

Room for 20: The space you reserve should have room for a minimum of 20 people with plenty of unobstructed walking space for camera crews to maneuver comfortably.

Stake it out: Don't rely on floor plans or verbal descriptions of your event site. Visit the place in person beforehand so you can scope out important considerations like electrical outlets, lighting, exits and backdrops. You'll want to station your spokespeople against a neutral, uncluttered and non-reflecting backdrop in an area where they are least likely to be disrupted.

Check the equipment: Do a test run of the equipment in advance of the event to work out any possible kinks.

Provide signage: If your event space is in a building with multiple floors and rooms, you'll want to post visual markers from the lobby to direct reporters to the right place. Some buildings have strict rules about posting with which you will need to comply. Check with the venue in advance.

Think visual: If appropriate, think through what compelling graphics to bring for TV cameras. These could include drawings, an item belonging to a child, etc., or a crowd of families and children who can act as a backdrop.

Spokespeople: Line up your speakers in advance, and hammer out a plan for who should carry which message and in what order. Ideally, feature no more than four speakers, and insist that speakers keep comments to three to five minutes. Hold a conference call by phone a few days prior to the event to review talking points and logistics. Before this meeting, send the news release and/or a message memo laying out the key points or “take aways” from the event.

Provide for parking: You don’t want reporters showing up late because they spent half an hour looking for parking. If your event is at a location where parking is difficult, make it clear on the advisory where they can park, such as nearby paid lots.

TURN OUT

Media list: Create and/or update your media list.

News advisory: Write the news advisory and send it out via fax and/or email three to four days before your event. Make sure to hit the local Associated Press “Daybook,” a calendar that reporters use to identify upcoming media events.

Pitch reporters: Make pitch calls to reporters two to three days before the event. Prioritize print media first, as they can take longer to navigate, and TV will often not make a commitment until the day of the event. On the morning of the event, make a round of confirmation calls.

News release: Write the news release to include in the press packets and to fax to media outlets after the event. Include quotes from speakers. The packet can also include bios of speakers, promotional brochures, copies of legislation, etc.

Follow up: Call back any key reporters that didn’t show up to the event, try to arrange an interview, and get them to write a story.

AT THE EVENT

Staffing: A minimum of two people are needed to staff a press conference: 1) The MC, or master of ceremonies, and 2) the media staffer. A third person, while not critical, can be extremely useful as a gopher who can run errands or deal with technical problems should they occur.

Prepare press packets and media sign-in sheet: Set up a table or, better yet, assign a volunteer to staff the front door with press packets to give to the press as well as a sign-in sheet for reporters to PRINT their names, outlets, and contact information.

MCing the event: The MC will be responsible for calling the event to order, introducing the spokespeople and facilitating a question-and-answer session with the press. The MC should close with an invitation to reporters to talk individually to spokespeople.

Working the room: As you're waiting for reporters to show, talk with the reporters who are present, and ask if you can help arrange individual interviews after the event. Once the event is over, approach reporters to facilitate additional one-on-ones with your spokespeople.

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