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Getting Your Message Out

Once you've designed your narrative intervention, you can use the VPSA structure to develop key messages for the audiences you're trying to reach. Communicators have more options than ever to get their message out into the world, including owned media, earned media, and creative projects.

Each has unique advantages, challenges, and best practices to ensure your values-based messaging is effective and persuasive.

Owned Media Has Power



Social media has become a primary source for newsworthy information and a powerful platform for social justice organizations. Unlike traditional earned media, which depends on news outlets to report your story, social platforms offer direct control over your narrative, allowing for stories to be told with greater nuance and care. This owned media space enables organizations to prioritize affirmative imagery and values-based messaging that advances liberatory narratives.

Earned Media Builds Trust & Credibility



The media landscape has changed significantly over the last couple of decades, but earned media is still an important part of a communications strategy. Gaining coverage for your issues and initiatives opens you up to new audiences and gets your message out to more people. There are a number of ways to engage in traditional media: sending out reactions to breaking news events, landing an interview with a reporter, writing an op-ed or letter to the editor, and engaging with reporters and editors or editorial boards to provide them background context for an issue. Remember, time is of the essence when seeking to insert your voice in rapidly shifting news cycles. Preparing your message ahead of time can help you act fast.

Cultural Strategies Build Bridges



Building relationships and working with diverse artists, activists, and cultural organizers can lead to powerful partnerships that advance social justice and promote themes and storylines that align with your key messages. Bringing together issue experts, advocates, activists, artists, and other creatives can build transformative bridges between the ideas and solutions we're promoting and the culture in which we live, work, and play. Cultural strategy is highly collaborative and deeply resonates with audiences. Especially in owned media spaces, authenticity is key. Part of the reason creative storytelling moves people powerfully is that it taps into shared values and experiences in ways that rehearsed talking points fall short.

When you're designing a values-based campaign, you will need to decide which domain(s) make the most sense for your narrative goals and target audiences.

On the following pages review our tips and tricks for designing impactful, targeted campaigns:

When you're creating content for social or digital spaces...

Choose Platforms Strategically



Focus your efforts where your target audience is most active. It's better to post consistently on one or two platforms than to spread yourself thin in too many online spaces where you don't have time to cultivate regular engagement.

Set Clear Goals



Define whether you're building an engaged community of supporters, converting followers into donors, or disseminating information about key issues, and build your content strategy around those objectives. Prioritize meaningful engagement—comments, shares, and saves—over passive reach (total followers, for example).

Use Trends Thoughtfully



Engage with trending topics and sounds when they align with your mission. Memes, hashtags, and viral moments can expand your reach. Stay flexible and adapt to algorithm changes by adjusting your content strategy. Remember that some platforms limit use of trending audios for business accounts, so be mindful to use in-app available audio to avoid copyright strikes (see below).



Engage with trending topics and sounds when they align with your mission.



Photo Credit: Shot by Somi

Think Like a Marketer



Social media requires time and resources, including dedicated budgets for ongoing social media advertising or influencer marketing campaigns. Depending on your goals and the platform, paid ads are often necessary to reach new audiences or convert social media followers into email subscribers and donors. Use campaigns to grow your base and drive action.

Tell Real, Powerful Stories



Use social media to share victories and successes that paint a picture of the world you're building, especially when traditional media doesn't cover these stories. By amplifying voices of those directly impacted by harmful systems and sharing stories of real people taking action, you can inspire others to mobilize and make activism feel accessible. Authenticity builds trust.

Stay Legal and Ethical



Get informed consent and signed releases before sharing personal stories online, respect copyright laws and limits on the "fair use" of media, and give proper credit with permission when sharing content from other creators. Develop a proactive plan for handling trolls, bots, or hate comments to protect your organization, staff, and the people whose stories you're sharing.

Partner With Purpose

- Work with influencers who align with your values and audiences. Focus on long-term, trust-based partnerships. Provide clear calls to action for their followers.

Make the Most of Video

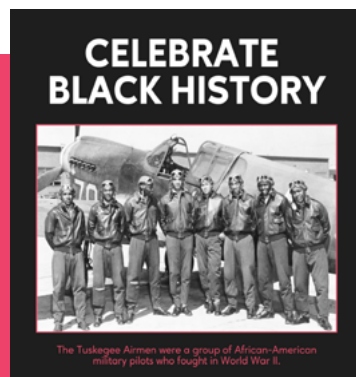
- Video performs best on many social media platforms. Use it to tell real stories, spotlight advocacy wins, and connect emotionally. Always add captions and optimize for sound-off viewing. Above all, have fun! Breaking up heavy issues with light-hearted, informative content can inspire engagement.

Create Bite-Sized, Platform-Specific Content

- Tailor content for each platform—quick vertical video clips for TikTok and Instagram, longer pieces and horizontal video for Facebook and YouTube. Break complex issues into digestible segments that viewers can quickly understand and share with others. Remember to hook audiences in the early seconds by making clear what your video is about and who it's for, and don't forget a call to action! Each platform provides their optimal video specs; follow them for length and format to improve your reach.



Break complex issues into digestible segments.



Follow us on Instagram @oppagenda for more examples.

Measure and Learn

- Track engagement metrics to understand what resonates with your audience, but also listen to qualitative feedback from the communities you serve. Use these insights to refine your approach and ensure your content truly advances your social justice goals rather than just generating views.

When you're working with traditional media...

Build Reporter Relationships

- The best way to build strong relationships with reporters is to understand their needs, deadlines, and what makes a story newsworthy. Reporters work fast and appreciate sources who are responsive and reliable. Regularly making yourself available helps them—and increases the chances they'll come to you again. Following the news closely also helps you anticipate when journalists might need a quote, reaction, or expert voice on an issue.

To assess if your story is newsworthy, ask: Is it timely, local, unexpected, trending, relevant to the audience, or tied to a prominent voice? Good media engagement goes beyond getting spokespeople in front of cameras. You can also shape coverage behind the scenes by crafting strong pitches, selecting compelling messengers, and working with producers and editors to shape stories “on background”—making sure to highlight your narrative, values, and solutions.

Choose Spokespeople



Busy reporters working on a deadline tend to go with the spokespeople you pitch them. This is a great opportunity for you to consider who embodies your narrative, including the values and human consequences at stake. This may not be your executive director or a member of your management team. Think about who your audience might relate to, and consider that messages can be made more powerful when they come from an unexpected voice.

Some knowledgeable and trusted messengers who can help change audiences' minds about an issue include:

- > Enlightened insiders: people who have spent time inside a system, recognized the need for change, and are willing to speak out.
- > Affected change agents: someone who was affected by a flawed system and took action to change it.



REMEMBER: It's important to understand the audience you're trying to reach before you decide on the best messenger for them. You can dive deeper into identifying your target audience in the Audience Strategy section of this toolkit (*Leading With Values*. Page 15.)

Prep for Interviews



Staying on message is not easy and requires practice. Use the VPSA framework (page 18) to organize your thoughts and focus on one clear, persuasive point, especially for short interviews. Know your audience and prepare accordingly. Remember, the goal is persuasion, not just publicity, so make sure your message truly lands, even if the reporter is including an unhelpful angle or interviewing someone with an opposing message.

If possible, schedule the interview so you can prepare in a quiet space. If it's unscheduled, it's fine to ask for a few minutes to collect yourself—hydrate, find quiet, and jot down your VPSA. Practice with colleagues and rehearse tough questions to build confidence and reduce nerves.

Project Your Power



Interviews can be nerve-wracking, even for experienced spokespeople. Remind yourself you're an expert, and draw on past experience speaking about the issue. Practice answering your most dreaded question to stay grounded and unflappable.

It's important to note that a lot of your message comes through in your body language and tone of voice, especially in video and audio content. In fact, some experts estimate that only 7 percent of an audience's understanding comes from the words you speak—body language and tone of voice matter most. Your audiences will be subconsciously thinking, "Do I relate to this person? Do I trust what they're saying?"



TOA PRO TIP:

For confrontational interview questions use the **pivot** to steer back to your message. Give a short, noninteresting answer to the question you were asked and follow it with one of these shortcut phrases:

- > "What's really important about this issue is..."
- > "What I want people to understand is..."
- > "What I'm here to talk about is..."