



## **Organizer Roundtable Resources Compelling Messages for Successful Campaigns**

The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability's Organizer Roundtable on June 17, 2009, brought Twin Cities organizers together to discuss campaign messaging and its importance in organizing. This roundtable provided an opportunity for organizers to join in a discussion about messaging practices in organizing campaigns, and to ask questions of regional leaders in organizing communications.

**Steven Renderos**, project coordinator for the [Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project](#) at the Chicano Studies Department at the University of Minnesota, discussed his work to change negative media portrayal of Latinos in Minnesota through research of existing media coverage and organizing Latino social justice groups to strategize new approaches to telling their stories.

He identified key steps in creating this type of change:

1. Identify concrete goals
2. Identify the target audience
3. Align your media outreach to reach that audience

Steven then described the three key steps he used to develop strong messages

1. Identify the problem
2. Identify the solution
3. Frame the solution in a way that motivates people to take action. Messages should be simple but effective.

In addition Steven discussed the importance of identifying community members as spokespersons, recognizing this is a leadership development opportunity. It is critical that the people most affected by the issue tell their story.

**Tracy Nordquist Babler**, the development and communications director for the [Alliance for Metropolitan Stability](#), discussed her work leading the communications of the [HIRE Minnesota](#) campaign. HIRE Minnesota is a coalition of 70 community organizations that are seeking public investments that jump-start our economy, provide access for all people to jobs, training and living wages, start to ease the climate crisis and promote healthy communities. Recently HIRE Minnesota leveraged \$2.5 million from the state legislature for training and outreach in green jobs and infrastructure stimulus spending.

Tracy reinforced Steven's suggestions for creating messages by adding:

1. Know, understand, and be close to your audience
2. Listening to your audience along with the experts
3. Test your message
4. Refine your message

In creating messages, Tracy emphasized the importance of listening to your audience and experts, then noting the messages that people react to. Many of the compelling phrases used in communications were simply phrases from HIRE's meetings. For instance, Karen Monahan of Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota said that HIRE Minnesotais "fighting poverty and pollution at the same time," and Louis King of Summit Academy OIC frequently says that "the best social service program in the world is a job." These became key messages of the campaign that were used over and over again. Key messages provided a framework to help everyone have words to articulate the issue, but were not rigid—individual voices were encouraged.

Messages were drafted and tested before they were widely distributed. HIRE Minnesota had strong built-in test audiences with its diverse organizations in the coalition. Tracy also sought feedback from people who were unfamiliar with the campaign. This helped identify problems with jargon and confusing messaging. It became clear that the messages were successful when they had been heard, repeated and then echoed back.

Tracy emphasized that grassroots organizers are well positioned to create effective messages because they know their communities and the issues facing their communities so well.

**Chuck Laszewski**, communications director at the [Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy](#) (MCEA), added that organizers engaged in a campaign can create some of the best messaging for a campaign. Chuck emphasized the importance of thinking about your audiences. Organizers often speak in a way targeted for their own group, when in fact they should be trying to reach those who are neutral, and get them to listen, care and support their issue.

Chuck worked with community members along the future Central Corridor LRT line who were concerned about displacement and gentrification issues. They were very passionate and had excellent grassroots support, but needed additional support to get their message out more broadly. After testing out different messages, the image of a stop sign, with the words [Stops for Us](#) became the most successful message, and lead to good coverage even prior to events. Chuck also discussed MCEA's use of maps in illustrating issues. Striking visuals can help drive the discussion and be easily shared with media and public officials.

Participants asked questions and discussed messaging challenges they struggle with. Themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- Community organizing and message creation is best when bottom up, but staying on message seems top down. You must be comfortable with variability in the message when you are using many different community voices as spokespeople.
- It is difficult to get stories about groups, organizations or collectives into the mainstream media when the emphasis is on the individual story and impact.
- There are more than two papers in the Twin Cities. Don't just focus on the big two -- it's often easier to build relationships with and get community press.
- There are alternatives to mainstream media, including producing your own media, such as Facebook, YouTube, or publishing your own article in online press such as Twin Cities Daily Planet.

- Web 2.0 tools to send your message out are accessible and can tell your campaign's story.

Even one-minute videos made on your inexpensive digital camera can be uploaded to YouTube, posted on Facebook, and seen by thousands.

Organizer Roundtables are one of the Alliance's strategies to build a network of organizers that work on issues related to growth and development in the Twin Cities. Roundtables are led by and for organizers and are held monthly at the Alliance's offices in Minneapolis. Please check our web site at [www.metrostability.org](http://www.metrostability.org) for upcoming roundtables.