

Basic

➤ Grassroots Campaigning

A grassroots campaign is a communications initiative that uses the advocacy of many to persuade a select few. The campaign structure is based on a pyramid model of persuasion in which change is achieved from the “bottom up” by building a broad base of advocates to enhance efforts that are aimed to impact a targeted individual or organization. While grassroots organizing is most commonly oriented toward affecting some form of political change, the approach is also used to elicit change within corporate structures and among community members. Conversely, a grassroots campaign is one that is targeted directly at the decision-makers themselves.

Purpose

More often than not, the strategic decision to engage in a grassroots campaign stems from one or more of the following objectives:

- Affect change in key decision-makers, both political and public, by building a broad base of supporters that advocate for a particular cause
- Bolster a campaign’s credibility by means of vocal, third party support
- Reinforce key campaign messages among targeted public and political audiences
- Support earned media efforts in driving media coverage about specific issues or initiatives

Elements

Traditionally, grassroots campaigns incorporate “on-the-ground” tactics like coalition building, special events, demonstrations, phone banking, letter writing, signature gathering and other canvassing efforts. However, modern day tools of the grassroots trade have grown to include Web-based and other interactive technologies like Podcasts and text messaging, as well as guerilla marketing techniques like leafleting and sidewalk chalking.

Keys to Success

While there is no single formula for success in grassroots campaigning (the context of every campaign is unique) there are a few general rules to follow:

1. Start Early.

Grassroots campaigns take a lot of time to organize and mobilize; cutting yourself short on prep time can mean the difference between winning and losing.

2. Develop a Plan.

Especially when dealing with larger groups, it’s imperative that the campaign be clearly defined. Decide who’s in charge, delegate the responsibilities, prepare your messages and establish a timeline.

3. Know Who Your Stakeholders Are.

Your constituents are, in essence, the driving force behind the entire campaign. Having a firm grasp on who these individuals are will be the key to maximizing their full potential.

4. Know How to Communicate with Stakeholders.

The members of your target audience will always dictate the best way to reach them. For example, if senior aged adults comprise the bulk of your stakeholder group, text messaging probably isn’t the best method of communication.

5. Know When to Communicate with Stakeholders.

Mobilizing your stakeholders when and where you need them isn’t a game best left to chance. Organizing a concerted “call-to-action” initiative requires attentiveness to critical campaign milestones.

6. Be Open to Adaptation and Opportunities.

The beauty (and burden) of a grassroots effort is that it constantly takes on a new shape as the campaign unfolds – so always keep an open mind and be ready to take advantage of new approaches and openings as they present themselves.