

## **Getting The Word Out**

**1. Media Relations** -- Seek to focus media on early grade reading, underscoring the need and inspiring people to get involved. Media partnerships can help reach families and caregivers. After packaging its community conversations and generating publicity and opinion leader attention for them, the United Way of San Diego was approached by the local newspaper for a new partnership. The paper now runs 30 education-focused stories and allows United Way to run a column or message adjacent to every article. Look to develop partnerships with Latino and African-American media as well, especially radio.

Many political, fundraising and issue campaigns use PR strategies to underscore the need, showcase human stories illustrating the problem, and to highlight grassroots solutions that could work on a larger scale.

- Use stories to help people connect to the issue at a deeper level. Data is important, but illustrate it with a story and you can help people connect with early grade reading through imagination and empathy. Share a real story of the challenge of early grade reading in your community. Is there a child behind the statistics? Work with your literacy coalition and other partners to highlight the story of an adult who is struggling because of literacy problems, and make the link to early intervention.
- Once you focus people's attention about the challenge, it's time to help them understand how they can be part of the solution. Create segmented calls to action, tools and action kits to help individuals – including youth, parents, educators, community leaders, faith leaders, business people and more – respond in meaningful ways.

Many times, supporters are willing to help – but are waiting for something specific to do! Here are four things you can ask supporters to do, which can also be used to solicit even more support:

- Speak at a media event
- Ask others in their industry/field to support the campaign.
- Suggest and meet with potential sponsors who can underwrite printing of materials to help kids and their families boost reading skills.
- Sign a letter to the editor. Ask a prominent volunteer – especially a business leader – to sign a letter to the local newspaper, telling why he/she thinks early grade reading is a critical issue facing the community. Cast the argument in terms of broader high school graduation improvements, which link workforce development.
- Introduce early grade reading as an important community issue at a company and encourage the company and individual employees to become actively involved.

**2. Grassroots or “building buzz”** -- Where do people play, pray, live and work?

If you're trying to reach parents or potential volunteers, consider getting your message out in community or recreation centers, malls, schools, libraries, grocery stores, laundromats, vocational and training centers and, of course, the companies where you conduct workforce campaigns.

You can create posters, tear-off pads, brochures, flyers, posters, bulletin board displays, literature rack, grocery bags & receipts, table top displays and more. Check out the 40 pre-packaged *Born Learning* parent education materials, which include ways to build language and literacy skills among young children. (More at [www.BornLearning.org](http://www.BornLearning.org), under Campaign Central)

Don't forget face-to-face: more community conversations, and returning to the original conversant for more listening or reaching out via social media and email to update participants on progress you have made.

Grassroots communications channels and tactics are good for targeting end users. In this case, it could be an effective and efficient part of a parent education and outreach strategy. This can be helpful if you're trying to help families understand how to support a child's pre-literacy and early reading skills, or to connect them with resources and referrals for possible reading delays (since the research suggests the earlier the referral the better, while parents often wait too long).

Here are two other ideas:

- **Use partners and media sources to spread the word.** Why reinvent the wheel to get your message out? Spread it through your partners and existing media sources. Local media, community organizations, and other human networks are great ways to disseminate a message throughout the community. Additionally, a message that is culturally appropriate and delivered through ethnic media either orally by a native speaker or in writing by a professional translator can be particularly effective at reaching speakers of other languages.
- **Deliver the message to the community in person whenever possible; Supplement with print and social media.** Flyers, pamphlets, Facebook pages, and other forms of print and social media are great ways to spread the word about an event or activity quickly. Nevertheless, they rarely receive the quality of connection and buy-in of a face-to-face conversation. Work with community partners to set up meetings where you can educate and recruit community members in a call to action. Revisit the places where you've done Community Conversations. If you have not already, get their contact information and give them the opportunity to receive notifications about advocating and volunteering opportunities by e-mail, text, social media and other means.

**3. Community and opinion leader outreach** – Whether it's a Constant Contact newsletter to business leaders about the early grade reading challenge and solution, or a B-to-B approach where business champions recruit their peers, opinion leader outreach may be a lower-profile but very effective to get the word out.

Using your workforce campaigns, events, invitations and e-communications you may already have underway to include the early grade reading issue can educate your Board members, company CEOs and other corporate executives and opinion leaders. Consider a Speaker's Bureau program, issue updates or special Constant Contact newsletters, reprints of any articles by the media, section of the annual report, e-mails.

One note: it's important to find out how your leaders get their information. Texting & brief emails with links or Facebook might be best for under-40 leaders, while Constant Contact e-mails (free to United Ways) might be best for older supporters. [Link for Constant Contact tools thru UWW?](#)

If you have even one opinion leader who is a champion for early grade reading (which can be framed as part of early childhood education), elevating that champion's visibility is win-win.

- Seek out media interviews for unusual allies (faith leaders, business leaders not already allied with education)
- Write letters to editor & community columns for champion to sign
- Send champion on speaking circuit – to peers
- Place columns in industry-specific media

**4. Traditional marketing** – Many United Ways start with traditional marketing or advertising, like brochures, direct mail postcards, ads on radio, cable and in newspapers, as well as promotional or giveaway items. These are tried and true approaches but can be quite costly -- so check your assumptions about the best tool for a certain audience. Select the best format and distribution plan for the message. Newspaper ads may be best to thank supporters or reach out to older opinion leaders, but not the best way to reach young people or to fulfill "mass marketing" strategies.

Here's another example: posting fliers at a community college is an excellent way to draw students to an early grade reading volunteer recruitment gathering, but may be ineffective with tenants in a mixed-income apartment complex. A Facebook invitation might be effective among young people in a neighborhood, but radio announcements and tri-fold pamphlets delivered door-to-door might work better with residents over 30

Pay attention to which methods work best for different segments of the community! Here's a cost-benefit analysis used in a Duke University's Nonprofit Certificate course on communications that may be useful.

VEHICLE	REACH	COST	BEST USE
Annual report	Targeted	High	Stewarding and attracting donors, foundations, partners, etc.
Print newsletter	Targeted	Mid	Stewarding and attracting donors and constituents
E-newsletter	Targeted	Low	Stewarding and attracting donors and constituents
Web site	General	Mid to high	Promotional/informational
Press kit	General	Low to mid	Building awareness and reaching new audiences
News release	General	Low	Building awareness and reaching new audiences
Public opinion poll	General	Mid to high	Benchmarking/testing
Bumper sticker	General	Low	Reaching new supporters and constituents
Direct mail appeal	Targeted	Low to high	Attracting donors