

The National Council on Independent Living presents –

# How to Make a Winning Campaign Message

**June 24, 2019**  
**3:00 – 4:30 p.m. EDT**

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Presented by: KEN MIRELES  
Partner, Public Alliance



# Today's Agenda

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- Item 1 – Introduction
- Item 2 – The “Why” Question.
- Item 3 – Crafting Your Message.
- Item 4 – Packaging Your Message.
- Item 5 – Delivering Your Message.
- Item 6 – Final Thoughts.



# 1. Introduction

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The most important component of a winning campaign is the development and consistent communication of a compelling message.

It's the central guiding theme of your campaign.

It conveys the reason you're running, why you're the most qualified candidate, and what you'll do to improve the lives of those in your community once elected.



# What Your Message is *Not*

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It's also important to understand what a message is *not*.

It's not your stump speech, your campaign slogan, the copy on your website, or the issue or group of issues on which you are running.

Instead, it incorporates and informs all of these things.



# Definition

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Paul Tully, the former political director of the DNC defined a message as:

***“A limited body of truthful information which is consistently conveyed by a candidate and an organization in order to provide the persuasive reasons for an audience to choose, and act on behalf of their choice of, our candidate.”***



# Your message should...

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- Be relevant to the issues in your district.
- Set you apart from your opponent.
- Make clear the values you stand for and what you'll fight for once in office.



# Your message should...

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Keep in mind that you will only have the time and resources to get two or three ideas across to the voters, who have limited time and attention spans.

Finally, your message should be truthful, concise, and conveyed repeatedly throughout all of your voter communication, including speeches, debates, digital and campaign literature, media appearances and fundraising appeals.



## 2. The “Why” Question.

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- This is one of the questions you will be asked most often, by voters and by the media.
- More importantly, it’s answer is one you should know well and believe, since it will be the foundation of your campaign message.





# Why are you running?

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- In other words, why should voters “hire” you over someone else?
- Since you’ve decided to run, you must believe that you are the best person for the job.
- That doesn’t necessarily mean you have better qualifications, more experience, or even greater intelligence than your opponent.
- So, what is it about you that distinguishes you from your opponent in a way that leads voters to select you?



# 3. Crafting Your Message

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- Campaigns are about choices.
- Be bold and be interesting. Otherwise, why bother?
- Is your message compelling enough to persuade voters to choose you over your opponent.



# Be true to yourself.

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- A good message is crafted to reflect the specific nuances of your candidacy, your district, and voters' concerns.
- Basic research will inform the development of your message, and should include the following...



# Be true to yourself.

**Self and Opposition Research.** Getting a handle on your own strengths and weaknesses as well as those of your opponent is an important first step in determining your strategy, preparing for potential attacks and developing your message.

- Acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses as a candidate, be completely honest with yourself and your team, **and be ruthless.**
- If there's something that might be embarrassing in your background, talk about it now **because your opponent will certainly talk about it later.**



# Be true to yourself.

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**Issue Research.** Conduct research on the issues that are likely to emerge during the campaign.

Your state party may provide research on the most prominent issues in the state; you and your staff should also prepare basic fact sheets and talking points on these issues, as well as on major issues important to your voters on which you should have a working knowledge.



# “Oppo” Research

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*“But I want to run a positive campaign based on this issues, not a negative campaign.” – Every Candidate Ever.*

## **TOO BAD!**

Campaigns are about choices - choices between candidates and ideas.

By defining the differences between you and your opponent, you’re not being “negative,” you’re helping voters make an informed decision.



# The Tully Message Box

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Using the research you've completed on yourself and your opponent, you now have the basic information necessary to begin the process of message development. Work with your inner circle to develop your message.

**One of the most effective tools to help this process is the *Tully Message Box*.**

The box visually categorizes the components of your message and that of your opponent into four categories, and it displays clearly how the campaign will be defined if you control the message, and how it will be defined if you allow your opponent to do so.



# The Tully Message Box

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What we're saying about us	What our opponent is saying about us
What we're saying about our opponent	What our opponent is saying about her/himself





# The Tully Message Box

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What sets you apart?

- Strike out similarities, both positive and negative.
- Consider what's left – what distinguishes you from your opponent(s).

What we're saying about us	What our opponent is saying about us
What we're saying about our opponent	What our opponent is saying about her/himself



# The Tully Message Box

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What's left?

- The essential differences between you and your opponent.
- From these attributes, you can spell out why you're the better choice for voters.
- This is how you arrive at your campaign message.

What we're saying about us	What our opponent is saying about us
What we're saying about our opponent	What our opponent is saying about her/himself



# The Tully Message Box

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The message box encapsulates your positives and your opponent's negatives.

It also anticipates the way your opponent will portray themselves and the charges they will make against you.

Developed early in the campaign, the Message Box will provide the four legs of the message platform upon which all campaign communication is built.



# The Campaign Theme

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- A simple phrase, sentence or word summing up the central point of why voters should choose you.
- Your campaign theme should:
  - Be easy to remember
  - Be interesting
  - Be consistent with what you care about
  - Work well with the issues you will be talking about



# Example Campaign Themes

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- Make America Great Again (2016)
- Stronger Together (2016)
- Change We Can Believe In (2008)
- Straight Talk (2000)
- Building a Bridge to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (1996)
- It's Morning in America (1984)



# 4. Packaging Your Message

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Once you've developed the fundamental building blocks of your overall message, you'll need to evaluate it, and make sure it's meeting the criteria for success.

The following is a checklist you should follow to ensure your message accomplishes what it needs to before you take it on the road...



# Checklist for Effective Messages

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## Does your message...

- ✓ **Establish Your Credibility?** Have you run a small business? Held local office? Led the fight for social change? Voters want to back a candidate they trust -- someone who has the experience to hit the ground running and advocate and legislate effectively once in office. Identify what skills and experiences you would bring to office and why they make you the best choice for the job.
- ✓ **Sound Relevant?** Does it address the issues of concern in your local community? Like donors, voters act in their own self-interest, so communicating how you will address their specific concerns, from job creation to property taxes to improving our schools, is key to gaining their support.



# Checklist for Effective Messages

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## Does your message...

- ✓ **Establish Contrast?** Voters must make a choice on Election Day, and your message must frame the debate in a way that makes you not only a good candidate, but a *better* choice than your opponent. To do so, you must tie your positives to your opponent's negatives.
  
- ✓ **Tell the Truth?** Whether you're touting your resume, answering questions about your taxes, highlighting your voting record, or explaining what you'll fight for once in office, be honest. Voters respect candidates who they trust, and dishonest claims are likely to be discovered and exploited during the course of your campaign.





# Checklist for Effective Messages

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**Does your message...**

- ✓ **Paint an Easy to Understand Picture?** Is your message easy to understand and done using simple language. Avoid detailed legislative language or jargon, and keep your message to two to three salient points.
  
- ✓ **Make a Connection?** People want to vote for people like themselves. Connect with your voters by highlighting shared experiences and telling personal stories that convey your humanity and your commitment to similar values.



# Checklist for Effective Messages

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**Does your message...**

- ✓ **Get Repeated, Repeated, and Repeated?** Your message should permeate and inform every speech, interview, public appearance, fundraising pitch, phone script and direct mail piece in your campaign.

Studies have shown that voters need to hear your message at least twelve times before it begins to sink in. If you're not tired of saying it, you're not saying it often enough.



# 5. Delivering Your Message

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Once you've developed your message that effectively tells voters (1) who you are, (2) why you are the best candidate and (3) what you'll do for them once in office – how do you make it translate to all areas of your campaign?

Ways to thread your political message through all aspects of your campaign:

- A. Direct Mail
- B. Fundraising
- C. Press
- D. Visibility
- E. Digital Media



# Earned Media

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The first important way to get your message out is what's called **Earned Media**.

It's the cheapest way to reach the widest group of people, and you and your team should always be thinking of ways to “earn” media, i.e. get free air and print time.



# Laying the Groundwork

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To do so, you should...

- Build and maintain a Media Contact List.
- Establish Systems
  - Vetting of Press Releases and Statements
  - Monitoring Print/Online Press and Social Media
  - Completing Questionnaires
  - Rapid Response



# Laying the Groundwork

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- Create a Media Kit
- Hold Meet & Greets
  - Always assume you're on the record.
  - Know reporters are reporters first, not your friends.
  - Tell the truth.
  - Respect a reporter's time.
  - Be prepared.



# Using the Tools of the Trade

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There are a variety of tools you'll want to use to generate press coverage for your campaign.

Here are the most common:

- A. Media Advisories/Press Releases*
- B. Press Conferences and Media Events*
- C. Interviews*
- D. Editorial Board Meetings*
- E. Blogs/Social Media*



# Using the Tools of the Trade

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## *G. Stump Speeches*

### Elements of an Effective Stump Speech

- Introduce Yourself
- Outline the Issues
- Establish Contrast
- Reinforce and Make the Ask

## *H. Surrogates*

Keep in mind that good press coverage is still never “free,” it costs your campaign lots of time, energy and effort to get it.





# Paid Media

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The second important way to get your message out is what is **Paid Media.**

Paid media, or the purchase of television, cable, radio, newspaper, or digital advertising, is a necessary component of nearly all competitive campaigns.

In fact, paid media is such an important and effective tool to communicate your message that together with voter contact, it should comprise at least 70% of your campaign budget.



# Paid Media

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The first and most important rule of investing in paid media is to dominate the medium, or buy enough time and/or space to rise above the clutter.

As a general rule, you should plan to choose a medium – be it TV, radio or digital – and dominate it.

Ideally you'll have the resources to purchase ads with the most prominent media in your district, and you'll have enough resources to run ads consistently in the final three weeks of the campaign.



# 6. Final Thoughts.

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Develop a clear, concise message that:

- Offers voters a clear choice between candidates, and
- Compels voters to choose you.

Deliver your message to your targeted voters in the most time and cost-efficient manner.

Repeat, repeat, and repeat some more!



# Questions & Answers

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Use the Q&A feature in the Zoom toolbar to type your question. You may also type your question in the chat box on the CART screen at <http://www.streamtext.net/player?event=NCIL-IGNITE>



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