
Communicating Effectively with Power

***Promoting real action with
your community group***

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with special thanks to the SPACE Coalition

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Introduction

This manual contains tips and ideas you can use to plan meetings with politicians and officials, deliver presentations in different settings, conduct meetings, and deal successfully with the media.

If your community group seeks to make a real difference for society, you need to let others know what you're about and what you hope to achieve. This means playing an active role in leading others to think about the issues you raise. It also means enlisting as many people as possible to support your efforts. Above all it means producing change in your community, the kind of change that will enhance that community.

Effective action in our communities helps us to imagine, plan, and provide the dynamic initiatives that truly support the spirit and power of a healthy civil society for everyone. This has a political dimension. It also has economic, societal, and spiritual dimensions.

We live in an age of sweeping and sometimes disconcerting changes in our world. At times it seems that some of the changes could be cataclysmic. Given this reality, community groups and community efforts are all the more important. When disaster strikes, ordinary people in communities are the first responders. On a less drastic scale, community groups supply the sustenance and collective will to build and maintain healthy communities over the longer term.

The needs of a human society, a compassionate society, our society, are too important to ignore or set aside. Continued affirmation of the right things to do to create a fair and equitable community remains essential.

Don't be afraid to speak out. Get your message out there. May the tips and ideas on the following pages help you in practical ways to do just that.

How to Use this Handbook

This handbook contains a number of tools designed to support the efforts of individuals and voluntary organizations in effectively addressing the issues related to community needs. The first step in changing public policy at any level occurs as people become aware of a problem. After that they develop an understanding of its scope and impact. Finally, they work to resolve the problem by joining with others to bring about change.

What Needs to be Done

The success of a grass-roots effort depends on the co-operation and activities of many people. Here's what *you* can do:

- ◆ **Contact the key person or people involved** as soon as possible to make them aware of an issue of community concern. Be ready to demonstrate the impact this issue is having, and what could be done to resolve it. Meet with everyone, including officials or politicians as needed to press your case.
- ◆ **Make others aware of the problem** by making presentations and by using the media (writing letters to the editor, producing articles for a local newspaper, issuing media releases, talking to reporters, holding media briefings) to get the message out.
- ◆ **Link up with other concerned people** such as neighbours, parents, or other people active in different community groups. Gaining additional allies and helpers can further your cause.
- ◆ **Get others *involved***. Once you've identified people affected by your community issue or who might be interested in this issue, the next step is to get them *actively involved* in dealing with the issue.

- ◆ **Keep in touch** and learn from what others are doing about issues in your community or elsewhere. You can share information about strategies and common challenges as well as celebrate successes together!
- ◆ **Being persistent** is crucial. Officials or others who are the “gatekeepers” for dealing with the issues you’re concerned about may try to discourage you in various ways. Never take “no” for an answer, especially in the early stages. Persistence on your part can win through eventually.



Meet with everyone – keep the message going

**Always focus your efforts on getting results
– real results.**

Potential Questions to Ask Publicly about a Specific Issue during a Municipal, Provincial, or Federal Election

Directions: The following questions will help you to question candidates about the issue you're concerned about for your community. The most effective way to phrase your questions is to link them directly to your own experience or that of others. Whenever possible, support your questions with examples from your community that show the effects of the issue that is of concern.

- ◆ "What is your opinion about supporting people in meeting their essential needs for food, medical and dental care, clothing, transportation, and shelter?"
- ◆ "Does your party truly believe in the value of providing adequate support to disadvantaged groups? In what practical ways does it actually demonstrate this belief?"
- ◆ "Are you and your party concerned about providing real and continuing opportunities for our young people? – if so, how?"
- ◆ "In specific terms, to what degree does your party support improved amenities such as affordable housing in our communities?"
- ◆ "To what degree will you and your party support concrete steps aimed at giving disabled people better access to jobs?"
- ◆ "Have you worked as a volunteer within the community and, if so, do you have first-hand experience related to the human issues and needs that arise for ordinary people, especially those with limited means?"

- ◆ “Not-for-profit-organizations form a valuable part of healthy communities. [Give an example from your community showing the importance of a community service or program and the impact it would have on you or your community if it didn’t exist]. How will you ensure such programs receive the support they need to continue to provide vital community services?”
- ◆ “Will you work to ensure fairness and equity in our society?”
- ◆ “Do you support the concept of a fair society, a good society, for everyone?”

Spend some time to think of additional questions. Often, groups can generate good questions with some open discussion or brainstorming.

Where and when to ask these questions

During elections you’ll be able to deal directly with candidates in a variety of settings. They might be available at candidates’ meetings or receptions. You might encounter them on your doorstep. Or you might be able to talk with them on phone-in programs or in cable television programs. Nowadays, web-based conferences may occur. You might also find some useful opportunities to explore using Twitter or other social media.

Some candidates increasingly use questionnaire surveys. Others may seek to contact you by fax or email. Sometimes too you might deal directly with a campaign worker who represents a candidate in your riding.

Be ready to pose one or more of the questions in our list whenever and however the opportunity arises. Good questions force out responses, good or bad. And the more we question our candidates, the more likely we are to prompt responses that move us in the direction of real solutions.

Meeting Elected Representatives

Canadians live in a society governed by people we elect to serve our interests, as well as those of the broader community. We expect our elected officials to be publicly accessible and accountable as they go about the business of government – enacting laws, creating public policy, and spending our money.

Successful politicians make a point of staying in close contact with the people who elect them and the issues voters think are important. One way of doing so is by regularly meeting with community representatives to discuss topics of interest. Politicians also keep careful track of the issues people call or write them about.

Who Should I Meet?

Federal members of parliament (MPs), member of the provincial parliament (MPPs, MLAs, MNAs), the mayor and other municipal politicians might all be useful people to focus on with your efforts. You can keep them informed about what you're doing and explain special needs you've identified. You can work to enlist their support for your efforts where possible. In some cases, your local board of education trustee might be helpful as well.

You can track down the appropriate politician to deal with through the websites available for the different levels of government. At times, you might find it useful to go in person to city hall, the provincial legislative building, or the parliament building (in Ottawa) to ask around and obtain direct information. Such personal visits can even result in direct meetings with people who can help you, including politicians.

Setting Up a Meeting

The best way to set up a meeting with an official or a politician is to

phone or email their office and simply request a meeting. Tell the person who responds that you wish to arrange a meeting with the politician. Be ready to describe the purpose of the meeting and to state who, besides yourself, will be attending.

Once you have an appointment, it's a good idea to follow up with a brief letter or email thanking the politician for taking the time to meet and confirming the date. This also provides an opportunity to include any materials relevant to the issue you're going to meet about – internet downloads, recent newspaper or magazine clippings, correspondence, brochures, and so on.

Preparing for the Meeting

Once you know how long the meeting will last, you can start planning your presentation. If more than one person is attending, ensure that each participant has a clear role. Give someone the responsibility of keeping track of time and ensuring that everyone sticks to the planned agenda.

Do a little research about the person you are going to meet – What party does this person belong to? What did they do before entering politics? What is their role? (most MPPs, MLAs, MNAs or MPs will specialize in particular issues or have certain responsibilities). You can gather a lot of this information with a bit of googling.

Keep in mind the resources of your local library. Librarians can be excellent sources of good information themselves and their staff members can point you in the right direction for conducting your research.

Have ready a document or brochure that you can leave with the politician or an assistant at the end of your meeting. This should outline your issue and its importance. It may also include a point or two showing why it would be in the politician's interest to support you and your group.

If you have not previously met with a politician or are nervous,

try rehearsing your presentation, or role-playing by having someone act the part of the politician while you run through your presentation.

The Meeting

Arrive a little early, so you don't feel rushed. But be prepared for possible delays in the meeting start time – political schedules are ever changing. After a round of introductions be prepared to make your presentation. Some politicians will sit and listen others will want to interrupt and ask questions. Be prepared to roll with the punches and accommodate various styles of interaction. But always be alert to opportunities to bring the discussion back to your main issue or the next point on your agenda.

Keep your goal(s) in mind throughout the meeting – develop awareness about the issue and work on building a continuing relationship with the politician. You're striving to win over a new ally or supporter. Recognize that achieving results you want may take time and may require a number of contacts.

As the meeting reaches the wrapping up stage, make sure someone takes advantage of the remaining time to quickly and concisely summarize or reiterate your most important point(s). End on a positive note, if possible, and thank the politician again for meeting.

Post-Meeting

Post-meeting follow up is another opportunity to reinforce your key message(s). Write a brief thank you note, part of which summarizes your issue. You can usually send this as an email. This communication can also serve as a way of providing the latest news about the issue, cover any points missed during the meeting, or to answer any question that required further research on your part. If the politician had agreed to do something for you, your communication can also serve as a gentle reminder.

Follow up by phone or email two to three weeks later and ask about the action taken as a result of the meeting.

If two or more of you went in to meet with the politician, hold a 'debriefing' session among yourselves immediately afterwards to share observations and to sharpen your case for the next encounter.

Tips and Pitfalls

- ◆ Be clear about who you are and who you represent (politicians give more credence to constituents than to agencies or funded groups even if they work in the area). If you represent an agency/volunteer group, spell out who you serve and represent from the community.
- ◆ Describe plainly what you want from the politician and what you are recommending.
- ◆ Dress appropriately – it is a formal meeting.
- ◆ Start by introducing yourself and any other participants.
- ◆ If you requested the meeting, be prepared to drive the meeting in a calm and considerate way.
- ◆ Be polite, focused, and business-like.
- ◆ Keep in mind that if the politician likes you she or he is more likely to support your cause.
- ◆ Stick to the issue and avoid being partisan – don't mention who you voted for or your political affiliation.
- ◆ Avoid getting upset at any point and don't resort to threats such as, "I'll never vote for you".
- ◆ If you're asked a question and don't know the answer, say so, but never guess at answers.
- ◆ The most important people in a politician's office are often the staff. Build a positive working relationship with them.
- ◆ Politicians love an audience, particularly of voters. Invite them

to your group's public events.

- ◆ Always follow up after the meeting with a thank you and a reminder about key outcomes of the meeting.
- ◆ Plan for ongoing contact – this helps build your relationship and credibility.
- ◆ Politicians belong to political parties, and rarely step out of line or publicly oppose their own party. Recognize and respect such limits.
- ◆ Avoid threatening or appearing to threaten to work with some other politician or party against the politician you're meeting now. This creates resentment and can easily backfire on your cause.



What's the cause?

Ongoing Communications with People Holding Public Office

While meeting face-to-face with elected people is best, there are also other ways you can have an impact. Write a letter, keeping in mind that your own individually-crafted letter is much better than a form letter produced by someone else. In general, by the way, even in this electronic age, politicians still pay more attention to letters than to emails or faxes. It's even possible that a handwritten letter will have a better impact. It conveys authenticity instead of machine-like efficiency. Phone calls can be useful too. People in public office do keep track.

Attempt to talk with your own mayor, councillor, trustee, MPP, MLA, MNA, or MP by phone if you can. You might also use email. Remember that political parties and government agencies or departments normally have websites these days. Makes use of them also. Often a website will contain good information for getting in touch with the person you want to deal with. You might also consider dropping by the politician's constituency office. Sometimes, surprisingly, you might meet the right people.

In some cases, you may be dealing with a politician who is not a member of the government. He or she may be a member of an opposition party. That's fine, MPPs, MLAs, MNAs or MPs have some power of their own, including committee memberships, so they can still be helpful. Similar provisions apply at the municipal level, although the precise governing structure may vary a little from city to city.

The meaning of a message lies in the understanding of the listener, not the intent of the speaker.

I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

Writing Letters to The Editor

Letters to the editor are one of the easiest, most effective ways to increase public awareness about an issue.

Most publications reserve space for letters from readers or members of the public. Published letters reach an important audience — decision-makers, community leaders, and people who influence public policy decisions. These days you can usually submit your letters by email. And newspapers regularly make provision for contact through the social media.

Some Tips

1. ***Start with a little research:***

- ◆ Each publication has its own way of dealing with letters. Most provide some basic instructional information about the length of letters and how they like them submitted.
- ◆ Look on the letters page or contact the publication to get some basic information about how to submit letters.
- ◆ Look at the letter being published for examples of format.

2. ***Letters are more likely to be published if they:***

- ◆ Relate to previous coverage or a topical issue and make specific reference to that previous coverage.
- ◆ Are short and to the point.
- ◆ Are passionate and/or well reasoned.
- ◆ Speak to issues the paper thinks are of interest to others.
- ◆ Are witty, amusing or provocative.
- ◆ Stick to the issue and avoid personal attacks on others.

3. **Writing:**

- ◆ Get your ideas down on paper, and then refine or edit.
- ◆ Focus on you most important point.
- ◆ Have someone you trust read your draft letter for feedback.
- ◆ Keep most of your sentences short and punchy.
- ◆ If you're having trouble writing, let someone know what you want to say. Get them write it down, then refine or edit.
- ◆ As a general rule, limit your letter to 3 paragraphs, with not more than 3 sentences in each.
- ◆ Personal stories are powerful. You don't have to be an expert. Write from the heart.

4. **Getting it in:**

- ◆ The only letters published are the one submitted.
- ◆ Don't be discouraged if your letter isn't published. Try again. Your chances improve the more times you write.
- ◆ The first letters to arrive are the most likely to be printed. Email will help you to get the jump on others.
- ◆ Lots of letters on the same topic improve the chances of publication and additional coverage.
- ◆ There are a lot of different publications. Submit your letter, or a variation, to as many as you like.

Submission Instruction Example: The Toronto Star

Send your contribution to Letters to the Editor:

via email to lettertoed@thestar.ca via fax to 416-869-4322

or by mail to:

One Yonge Street,
Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1E6

The Media Release

Many organizations, including political parties and corporations, regularly use media releases to get news out. If the newspapers, radio or television stations actually use the information in your release, you've succeeded. The media will then spread your news to their varied audiences – for free!

Keep a list of media contacts who may be interested in your issue locally or provincially. Most politicians send out newsletters from time to time. Keep these in your files. They usually contain good information about contacts and the interests of the politician concerned.

Keeping a list of alternative or small media (e.g., ethno-specific media, cable TV public interest, community newspapers, or radio, university/college radio) is generally a good idea. Sometimes interested groups or media may wish to connect with you in *strategic alliances* for particular purposes.

Plan your media strategy. This is vital. Think through what you want to achieve in your publicity. Perhaps you can provide a media release at a media conference. Possibly you could stage a bit of street theatre and invite media people to come and see it. And remember letters to the editor. Perhaps you can produce an article that a paper may agree to publish. Or you could produce a video for distribution, including on You Tube. The possibilities are many these days, but they need a bit of thinking and planning ahead of time.

If you plan on using a media event, keep in mind that the best timing for a media event is before *deadline* (normally 10:30 or 11:00 a.m.). Send out a **media advisory** the day before your media event. Include just enough information about your event to get them to attend – time, place, and subject. Try to give them a “grabber” about your issue. But don't tell them everything, or they won't attend!

Media outlets receive many media releases every day, but can only deal with a few. Something really needs to stand out and grab them to spark interest.

The first rule is to put the *topic* of your media release right up front. This makes use of the well-known pyramid technique of journalistic writing – start with why it is important. You want to spill the beans straight away. Work to make your title a real ‘grabber’.

Put your basic information for the whole release right up front in your first paragraph. Aim for a maximum length of 20 words for this opening paragraph.

Use wording that is clear, short and simple, but meaningful. Emphasize concrete words, not abstract phrasings. Above all, be factually accurate. And try to keep your media release to *one* key topic, preferably one you can convey quickly and memorably.

If possible, come up with a catchy quotation or two that media people can use *as written* right away.

Spend a little time making sure your media release is worded accurately and that it captures the key elements of the story properly. Ensure it is difficult or impossible to misunderstand. Test it out on different people. Ideally, your media release will reflect well on you and your organization, and be able to stand up to close scrutiny by a wide range of people.

Some basic information must always be included in the layout of your media release. This information must stand out clearly. Some variation may occur in the precise layout used by different organizations. Strive for a one-page limit. The example given on page 20 provides you with a model that is effective for a wide variety of purposes. (The ‘- 30 -’ that is shown is a convention that is normally used for ending the release.)

You can deliver releases in a number of ways. Increasingly, however, email is preferred because of its speed compared to regu-

lar post or courier. It's a good idea to follow up with a telephone call to ensure the release arrived and to reinforce your contact with the media.

Make sure the media has a way of contacting you for questions or additional background, and that you really are available!

Remember, journalists are busy people. If they are working on a story, there is almost always a looming deadline or an editor thumping around in the background. Once the decision is made to cover your story, the more help you can provide the journalist to tell your story well, the more effective it is likely to be.

Help the media people to help you.



Your gathering could interest the media

Media Release Form

Organization

Address information

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT PERSON

DATE

Topic of Release

Brief summary of contents (optional)

Message

- 30 -

Media Briefing Tips

When you provide people from the media with a briefing, keep the following points in mind:

1. Journalists are in the business of bringing news to their audiences that is interesting and, if possible, compelling.
2. Bring out brief points that are likely to be of interest to the general public.
3. Carefully think through what you want the media to do for you.
4. If you'll be presenting as a group, make sure everyone in your group is clearly on message before the briefing starts.
5. Provide the media with a good angle or catchy phrase they can work with to put your viewpoint across to others.
6. Supply good reasons why the media will want to use your information.
7. If possible, provide some good quotes or lines the media can use right away.
8. Keep your briefing short, simple, and to the point.
9. Keep your tone friendly and open throughout.
10. Be sure of your facts and don't be afraid to say "I don't know". Never exaggerate or stretch the truth. (News media do employ "fact checkers" to ensure accuracy.)
11. Be ready to give the media contacts who can add first-hand experience or act as good sources for additional comments.
12. If you have additional information in print form, make it available – but make sure it's clear and not too lengthy.
13. Don't be disappointed if your efforts don't result in immediate coverage. 'Planting the seed' could generate coverage later on.
14. Remain positive throughout – don't let yourself be provoked.

Being Interviewed by the Media

Quite often, if they're interested in your story, members of the media will call or email to arrange an interview. You need to be ready for this type of contact and prepare yourself for responding to questions effectively.

Media interviews these days can involve person-to-person contact, questions sent by email, or interviews on television (including cable and Skype). If you think you might be interviewed via Skype, by the way, it's a good idea to be registered on Skype and to have a webcam on your computer. (Skype interviews can be arranged virtually anywhere in the world.)

The reporter's main interest in interviewing you is to get a good story and, if possible, some good lines to use. If you're making a controversial point, so much the better. From the reporter's point of view the main thing is to get an interview that's worth publishing or broadcasting. Dry recitations of information will not appeal.

If you'll be interviewed on camera, ensure you're dressed appropriately and have a good backdrop to show the world. And use the best angle for projecting your face (chin-out angles can be irritating).

Your goal in an interview is to get your message out as clearly and forthrightly as possible. Your message cannot be tangled or confusing. It must be short, to the point, and, if possible, memorable.

Think through your interview approach before you receive a call from a member of the media. Even an apparently casual call should be considered an interview. Above all, you want to sound as though you know what you're talking about and that you have something to say that's worth hearing.

If possible, you should rehearse being interviewed with a colleague. Record the event and then review it with a critical eye.

Get things right in your interview, and you'll gain valuable ground for your cause.

Making a Deputation to a Government Committee

Deputations give citizens the opportunity to participate in government decision-making processes. It is also the opportunity for interested parties to appear at meetings of standing committees of the local municipal council, the provincial legislature, or federal parliament to speak on matters of concern. (Remember too that Senate committees can often be highly useful for publicizing issues and getting important matters brought to public notice.)

It's easy to speak to a committee. You don't have to be an expert. You don't have to make a formal speech. You should be treated politely by committee members and will have support in the room from other community members.

Speaking to a committee

Put your name on the list of deputants by calling the committee secretary in the Clerk's Office or other designated office responsible for the committee you wish to address.

Tell them you want to make a deputation. You should then receive a time and date for your deputation.

If you're added to the list, you will have a specified length of time to speak. This could be as short as about 3 minutes.

You will likely want to prepare notes or to write out your presentation ahead of time to make sure that you have a good chance of dealing with all the points you want to make within the time allotted.

Do a rehearsal or two ahead of time, possibly practicing your presentation in front of family or friends.

When you arrive in good time on the date specified and you're waiting for your turn to speak, avoid getting distracted by what other deputants are saying (you don't want to be caught up in someone else's agenda).

Keep to your script or presentation plan despite what others may have said – it's okay to repeat points people may already have made.

Committee members may ask you questions when you've finished. If you don't know the answer, just say so. Avoid any temptation to exaggerate or to distort the facts. Do your best to be polite, calm, confident, and poised in your responses.

Be sure to thank the committee for hearing you out and try to leave them with a good final thought about your central concern.

Throughout

- ◆ Relax and make yourself comfortable
- ◆ Speak from your heart and from your own knowledge and experiences.
- ◆ Give any written materials you've prepare for handing out to the committee secretary, who will distribute them to committee members.
- ◆ **Enjoy the process!** Your views are a crucial part of public decision making. City councillors, board trustees, members of the provincial or federal parliament are all elected to represent and hear from the public, to hear from you! It's an essential part of our democratic process.

**In the end, politicians are servants of the people,
not the other way around.**

**Make it easy
for them to
say 'yes'.**

About Your Presentation or Briefing

Many people feel a sense of panic or dread at the idea of speaking in public. Stage fright is experienced by most people. The key thing, though, is to work through that fright and prepare yourself as effectively as you can for presenting what you have to say. When you're well prepared, your stage fright will come under much better control.

In writing out your notes for your speech or presentation, keep in mind the following basic break-out for the ordering of your material:

- ◆ Purpose of your presentation.
- ◆ Information in order (usually from most important to lesser importance).
- ◆ Closing (with a good final thought).

In thinking of making a presentation, keep in mind that the members of your audience will not normally be "out to get you," although some political issues may generate heat. If you know that your topic will cause some heat to arise, arm yourself with your reasons for the approach you take and keep those reasons in mind no matter how sharp-tongued some people might be in responding to you. And if someone is critical, remain calm and self-assured. Despite the critical people, you will have supporters in the audience as well, and they're rooting for you. They're on your side. So you're really fighting for others as well as yourself.

If you think the going might be rough ahead of time, preparation is all the more important. Have your facts down cold (and accurate). And have some notes with you as reinforcements in case you wish to refer to them during your presentation (file cards can be handy for this). If possible, prepare the location where you'll be

making your presentation ahead of time, including the immediate equipment such as a lectern or table. If there's a microphone, make sure it's adjusted to your height and that it's switched on at the right volume. If you receive a lapel mike to wear, make sure you attach it securely and close enough to your mouth to pick up clearly what you say. If possible, test it.

If you work with slides, make sure they're easy for your audience to see. In the case of slides with text, make sure the text is of a large enough font size (minimum 28 points) for your audience to see, especially those at the back of the room. If you have graphs or tables, make sure they're as clear and visible as possible. You don't want to torture your audience with charts that are too small. (If you do have graphs or tables that are small, set them up as handouts for distribution to your audience.)

Check the location of the media projector. Ensure that nothing will interfere with a clear projection path from the projector to the screen. By the way, if any lights are shining on the screen, have them turned off or deflected if possible.

In some cases, someone will introduce you to the audience. Prepare a brief introductory note for that person to use in making the introduction (they won't necessarily use it as you write it, but it saves them some research and gives you a chance to make accurate references to yourself and your group).

Give yourself a little break time before speaking. Calm yourself with deep and slower breathing (abdominal, not thoracic) and make sure your muscles are relaxed. Think of how successful you're going to be.

When you get to the lectern or the speaking position, don't feel that you have to start talking right away. Check that everything is set out as you want it (notes, glass of water, any objects you may want to use to illustrate something).

Look out at your audience calmly, sweep the room with your eyes, and begin to talk. Speak in a clear and confident voice, being sure to use enough volume to make yourself heard comfortably

throughout the room. Speak from your diaphragm, not your throat. This gives you better and deeper voice control and allows you to project better.

Note that even if you're using a microphone, you have to speak clearly and with sufficient volume for correct pick-up – you also need to make sure the mike is working properly!

It's highly important to keep track of time during your presentation. You don't want to run out of time before you've made your key points. Further, you don't want to run over time. People are not generally unhappy if you finish ahead of time. But they can become quite unhappy and fidgety if you run late.

Sometimes, when other speakers or presenters are involved, the amount of time you were given originally may shrink suddenly. You must prepare for this. Keep in mind the following priority levels for arranging your material:

- ◆ Must include
- ◆ Should include
- ◆ Nice to include

When time is short, it becomes essential to focus on the essentials. So you may have to discard some items you thought would be interesting. At the very least, you need to retain the "must include" items.

In many cases questions from the audience may be encouraged after you've finished speaking. Respond to such questions with dignity, calmness, and objectivity. Even if a question seems a bit absurd, treat it with respect. Keep in mind that the questions session is really part of your overall presentation. So you might be able to make a few additional good points in your responses.

When the concluding point is reached, be sure to leave your audience with a good final thought they can take away with them in their thoughts. Good final thoughts can sink in and continue to work for you in the future.

Pre-Presentation Checklist

Item	Needed	Not needed
◆ Make sure you have your presentation notes and any other materials with you for your presentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ Arrive in good time to allow yourself a bit of relaxation and final preparation time.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ If time permits, meet with members of your audience ahead of time, but don't overdo it.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ Ensure you have a continuing liaison/co-ordination person you can call on for the duration of your time at the meeting or conference.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ Make sure the microphone (if available) is well positioned and in good working order.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ Do your best to ensure that you will not experience outside interruptions during your presentation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ Arrange your own positioning in the room as flexibly as you can – being sure to have a good place for your notes and materials and some water for sipping.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ If you have handouts, make sure you have sufficient for the audience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ If possible, and you plan to use it, make sure you can connect with the media projector properly and that it's working.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
◆ Check that you have good pens for a flip chart or whiteboard, if you think you'll be using such display devices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Points to Keep in Mind in All Your Communication Activities

- ◆ People pay more attention to those who come across as confident about what they're saying.
- ◆ Specific and concrete statements work best in your communications – avoid generalizations or lofty statements.
- ◆ People enjoy stories or anecdotes about people (including themselves!).
- ◆ Readily understood, specific, and relevant facts and figures convey your points best (but not too many).
- ◆ Every day words and shorter sentences work best for most issues of communication.
- ◆ Good communications generally involve positive or affirmative wording (watch out for the 'no' or 'not' problem).
- ◆ Simple analogies, images, anecdotes, or examples help your communications.
- ◆ Unspoken assumptions in your communications can be dangerous.
- ◆ Communications that come across as attempting to 'impose authority' don't go down well.
- ◆ Flow charts, tables, diagrams, graphs, maps, and pictures may help communications if they're not overloaded with information and make good use of colour for highlighting.
- ◆ The closing is an important part of your communication, so leaving people with a good final thought is a good idea.

Getting Your Planning Underway

At various times you'll be interested in planning some action with your group. Planning is an important activity and must not be rushed. Good planning beforehand wards off disasters later. Keep these key points in mind as you engage in planning:

Develop Your Group's Objective

Identify All the Factors Involved

Given the Factors, Select the Best Available Option

Based on the Best Option, Develop Your Plan

Never just rush into things. Always plan what you're going to do. Good planning will give you the best possible results.

SWOT Your Plan

You can often do a good analysis of a given process or course of action by doing a SWOT analysis. Use the key words as shown below to guide you in an assessment of what you plan to do. This will help to bring out important details that you may have overlooked earlier.

Some groups find it useful to set out pages on a table or wall, one page for each of the four key SWOT elements. You can do the same thing with flip chart pages for a larger group. The important thing is to take time to do the analysis properly.

- 1. Strengths**
- 2. Weaknesses**
- 3. Opportunities**
- 4. Threats**

In working through these elements be honest and don't leave anything out. The idea is to apply a good test for your plan. In the longer run this will go far to ensuring your success.

Recording a Video

These days it seems that practically everyone is carrying a camera around. Usually these cameras have sound and video or movie capabilities, even if they're on smartphones. People can quickly record a video anywhere and then upload it right away to YouTube straight from their electronic device. They might also mail their video production (electronically) to a television station for later broadcast on the news. Such capacities are revolutionary in our times.

We need to adjust our thinking to the world we're living in with all its digital possibilities. For community groups it spells opportunity. If your group can record a good video to explain what you're about and what you want to achieve, you can broadcast dynamically to the world for anyone to see and hear.

The essentials of making a good presentation apply to making a good video as well. Additionally, you need to pay special attention to focus, lighting, and good sound quality. Further, the composition of your scenes must be appealing to the eye. And avoid clutter.

When you record a video, keep the following points in mind:

1. Make your purpose clear from the start.
2. Introduce yourself and others plainly and briefly.
3. Retain good technical quality throughout your production.
4. Keep the movement of your camera to a minimum — sudden cutaways, scanning, or close-ups can seriously detract from what you're doing — remember that most of the time the movement should be in the people or events, not in your camera.
5. Make sure you're not wearing clothing or colours that will cause distracting effects in your video.
6. Set up a background for your video that is interesting but does

- not take attention away from your main focal point.
7. Make sure any written signs in the background are readable and that they don't detract from your general message.
 8. Don't rush or slur your speaking – be clear and well paced. (Remember rhythm, speed, volume, and pitch – RSVP.)
 9. Be upbeat and positive (but don't sound jolly about bad news or tragedies).
 10. Remain consistent with your purpose – don't arbitrarily bring in other concerns half way through.
 11. Keep things well paced – not too slow, not too fast.
 12. Work with focus, lighting, sound, and composition throughout to ensure the whole video retains an attractive and coherent quality.
 13. Take care with interesting or exciting clips to ensure that they don't detract from your central message.
 14. Avoid making your video too lengthy – look for that “just right” amount of recording.
 15. Conclude in a positive, confident way, with a good final thought or view for your viewer.

Even simple and inexpensive equipment can allow you to produce videos with appeal. You just have to take care and keep your prospective audience in mind all the way along.

Make sure you have a good storage system for storing your video for future use. And make duplicates with recording dates. You never know when occasions will arise that will benefit from seeing your video.

Naturally, you should look for distribution opportunities wherever you can find them. These could be with other non-profit groups, or they could be through commercial channels or on You Tube. Just make sure you're going to be heard and seen in as many places as possible.

On Being Political

Sometimes, a non-profit group may move into the territory of the political. They can do this deliberately or inadvertently. The question is: *Must they avoid being political at all costs?*

In some cases, politicians in positions of power may take exception to some of the statements or actions of a given group. Then they could declare that non-profits have no business engaging in political activities. They could believe this strongly, but they would be wrong.

Sometimes, what non-profit organizations do can be *interpreted* as being political without the group deliberately seeking to take a political stance. If the government cuts back on paying for medical assistance for people on social assistance, for instance, a non-profit group might enter the picture and seek to provide such support, to replace the previous government support. This could be interpreted as the group making a political statement. But if such action is within the normal mandate of the group, it's not political at all, although the noses of a few politicians might bend a little.

Canada's charity law permits registered charities to engage in limited political activity for up to 10 per cent of their activity. The regulations define permissible activity. Excluded are partisan activities like supporting or opposing specific candidates or parties. The political activity must be related to the charitable purpose of the organization, and generally aimed at creating a broader understanding of issues and problems.

Allan Broadbent¹

As Broadbent and others have pointed out, most charities in

¹ Allan Broadbent. *A Call for Canadian Charities to Become Politically Active*. The Toronto Star, April 21, 2012.

Canada don't take advantage of their political possibilities. They shrink from this kind of engagement. Yet the Canada Revenue Agency has clear rules to follow and will share them with any charity that asks.

In discussing their communication activities, non-profits should consider their opportunities without engaging in a kind of self-censorship to prevent themselves from being as forthright and public in their statements as they could be or should be. In many cases this would play fair with the general public who otherwise might be susceptible to the distorting propaganda activities of particular interest groups or their politician allies. A critical aspect of maintaining a democratic system is that the people be well informed about what is happening in their world.

In preparing a political action or statement, a group should think of what they want to say or declare and then test it against the CRA guidelines for political activity and make adjustments as needed. When it seems to be all right against the guidelines, the group should go ahead.

Non-profit groups should not go out of their way to "be political". But neither should they shrink from taking action because someone thinks it might be political. The fundamental question is: *Would such action further the cause to which the group is dedicated?*

Politics is not some sort of realm reserved for a special few. It lies at the heart of society, especially a democratic society. It is, or should be, the realm of ordinary people. And those ordinary people may well belong to non-profit groups with a legitimate interest in what political activity can do for them and their causes.

If you believe your cause is a good one, it's worth proclaiming it in every way possible.

Conducting All Candidates Meetings

By Pat Suessmuth

Late Executive Director, Erin Hoops

First: These are simple to conduct. The hardest part is contacting and lining up the candidates.

Second: There are three levels of government (Municipal/ Provincial/Federal) and the same meeting format can be used with all three.

The **benefits** to your organization are:

- ◆ Your organization becomes known to the candidates;
- ◆ Your organization is seen as being helpful to people – candidates especially;
- ◆ Your organization connects with “new/more/other” people in your area;
- ◆ Political connections are created for your organization;
- ◆ Your organizations receives added status in your community – big time.

Steps and timeline leading up to actual candidate meeting:

Steps Leading To Meeting	Timeline In Weeks/Days before Meeting
1. Find Out/Know election day date	At least 10 weeks in advance

<p>2. Set tentative meeting date</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Contact Local Paper(s) for best meeting date against their publishing plans and invite them to the meeting. 	<p>At least 10 weeks in advance</p>
<p>3. Estimate attendance expected</p>	<p>At least 10 weeks in advance</p>
<p>4. Estimate length of meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 2.5 hours (10 min. for late start – 10 min. opening introductions – ½ hour for school trustees – ¾ hour for mayor – ¾ hour for candidates – 10 minutes for closing). 	<p>At least 10 weeks in advance</p>
<p>5. Find and book meeting room</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Room needs mikes and sound system, adequate chairs, tables, and lectern. ◆ Book meeting room for 3 hours so as to start meeting a half hour before formal part to provide community time to socialize with candidates. 	<p>At least 10 weeks in advance</p>
<p>6. Contact Radio, TV, etc and involve them in meeting</p>	<p>At least 10 weeks in advance</p>
<p>7. Contact Candidates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Start with incumbent or front running candidate ◆ Once confirmed with incumbent/leading candidate, the other candidates will fall in line too. ◆ Need: candidates correct name, address, email address and phone numbers. ◆ Note campaign manager’s name if given as s/he can often be your best contact. 	<p>At least 10 weeks in advance</p>

<p>8. Find, select and confirm meeting Master of Ceremonies or Moderator</p>	<p>At least 8 weeks in advance</p>
<p>9. Advertising Meeting – plan and use everything you can.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ We use flyers, sign board at meeting facility, emails, newspaper articles, web page on our organization’s web site, radio/TV interviews – talk it up, word of mouth, etc. (Mailings and newspaper ads cost too much for this activity.) 	<p><i>Plan</i> 8 weeks in advance</p> <p><i>Implement</i> 2 to 3 weeks in advance</p>
<p>10. Plan meeting (with moderator)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Three parts possible in municipal elections – Trustee, Mayor, and Councillors Parts. ◆ Meeting Plan for each Part: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Moderator welcomes</i> everyone and introduces candidates and explains process to all. 2. <i>Introductions</i> – presentation order determined by draw names from a hat – each candidate speaks for 3 min. 3. <i>Moderator times and give 15 sec. warning.</i> 4. <i>Issues debate</i> by candidates followed by audience questions. 5. <i>Questions from audience</i> either in writing or verbal into mikes in audience area. (Written is better as it is impossible for the moderator to control/cut off people being long winded on the audience mikes.) Allow only 2 min. for each person’s response to a question. 6. <i>Closing candidate comments</i> – moderator gives each candidate 2 min. closing comments. 7. <i>Moderator closing</i> thanking everyone including host organization. 	<p>At least 1 to 2 weeks in advance</p>

11. Other Meeting Considerations

- ◆ If written questions used: 1) set up side table, 2) provide jar/bowl for questions beside moderator so moderator can read, select and combine questions, 3) supply pencils and notepads roughly 4 X 6". (Large paper leads to impossible questions. 4) funnel questions to moderator as appropriate.
- ◆ Coffee - provide for free, people appreciate gesture, and think better of sponsoring organization.
- ◆ Doors open half an hour in advance so community can socialize with candidates before meeting starts.
- ◆ Tables for candidate materials on a side wall are a must.
- ◆ Donation Jars - On table with notepads and pencils for questions and on the free coffee table.

Pat Suessmuth (1938-2014)

Pat managed Erin Hoops for over twenty years. Initially, Erin Hoops was a small club devoted to basketball, which the members played in local school gymnasiums. Over time the club expanded to include other sports. A disused public school in Erin (northwest of Toronto) became the central base for Erin Hoops' many activities. This was called Main Place. Erin Hoops offered summer camps for young people. These camps expanded dramatically over the years, and people in the surrounding area knew about them and their excellent reputation, including as far as Guelph, Orangeville and Brampton. Pat was widely praised for his many energetic activities on behalf of his town and was honoured for his work by local service clubs.

Working with Feedback

The usual feedback or evaluation sheets used for meetings or other types of group sessions tend to be a bit too general. Sometimes they even end up as what some people refer to as “happy sheets”. In those cases the tendency is for people to sign off in a contented way without necessarily pinpointing important concerns or potential winning suggestions for the future. Many people don’t bother responding to them at all.

Evaluation should not consist of some sort of fault-finding. Indeed, it should not be negative at all. The idea is more one of obtaining useful feedback for potential adjustments so that future actions or activities have a better chance of success.

The fundamental issue for your feedback concerns your plan and how well it worked out compared to how you had hoped it would work. Did your action or activity live up to planned expectations? Did it succeed beyond the scope of what you had hoped for? Or did it fall short in some way?

When a group has planned an action or activity, the group should go through a process afterwards of dissecting how well it went and whether it meant that your plan had succeeded or that some areas needing adjustment had cropped up.

In the military and other lines of work “post-action assessments” are standard. These probe to find out how well a particular operation went, what glitches occurred, and what should be done in the future to achieve greater success. These assessments are often invaluable. Generally, they’re written up for future reference.

Your group can do its own post-action assessments. This gives you a good chance of achieving continuing improvement in all that you do and set out to do. The *Activity Commentary* set out on page 44 can give you a good start point.

In working with the *Activity Commentary*, have each member of

your group respond to the questions as soon as possible after your activity or action. You don't need names on each sheet, but you do need to gather individual commentaries to produce a collective commentary for the group as a whole.

Once everyone has had a chance to fill out this form and hand it in, summarize all the responses on one sheet. Then, if time permits, encourage a group discussion of the responses and the possible actions or activities for the future. Remember, you don't want this discussion to be a fault-finding process. You're looking for sensible possibilities and future successes.

Naturally, you should feel free to modify the Activity Commentary to suit your own needs more specifically. Be careful, though, not to end up with a standard "happy sheet" if you do so.

In some cases, you may not be able to have the group discussion right away. Then you should have a later meeting specifically to go over the group responses and to lay out conclusions and recommendations for yourselves.

Sometimes it's possible to put the responses into a presentation using PowerPoint or Keynote or some other presentation program. This can work well with the right set-up.

If practical, you might write a post-action assessment to set out your findings and clear conclusions and recommendations for the future. This may seem time-consuming, but it can be well worth the effort over the longer term.

Activity Commentary

Use the numbers to indicate: 1 = highly successful; 2 = mostly successful; 3 = less successful than we had hoped; 4 = unsuccessful.

- | | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Our effort to achieve our objective was ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Each person in our group played a role in our activity that was ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Our attempt to achieve a productive level of interaction or dialogue with the person or people we were dealing with was ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. The location for our activity worked out for us in a way that was ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Our effort to achieve a continuing positive link with the person or people we were dealing with was ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Please list here any points that stand out in your mind right now concerning the action or activity: | | | | |
| 7. What suggestions occur to you at this point concerning future actions by our group? | | | | |

About Robyn Peterson

Robyn has had involvement with non-profit groups over many years. Twenty-five years ago, for instance, she was an executive member (VP communications) of APTO (Association of Professional Training Organizations). More recently she has served with the SPACE coalition (Save Public Access to Community Space Everywhere). She's also worked with people from KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives), and with a small group called "Shoelace" at a Baptist church in Toronto's east end. For over ten years she served as a special adviser to Erin Hoops, a non-profit organization in Erin, Ontario that focused on providing recreational and other opportunities for young people in the local community.

Robyn has a B.A. (history) and M.A. (adult education) from the University of Toronto and has many years of experience in providing training in corporate and college settings. Her main subjects have involved leadership, organizational behaviour, communications, and interpersonal relations.

In all her educational and training activities she has looked for fairness in the way people deal with each other. She believes very much in the concept of an equitable society.

In the early 1990s Robyn wrote two books published by Kogan Page in London, England: *Managing Successful Learning* and *Training Needs Analysis in the Workplace*. The latter book came out in a new edition in 1998 and sold so well that it went into a new printing in the autumn of 1999. Over the years she has published many articles.

She now edits and publishes online a newsletter called *Sayout* that deals with the social and economic issues of our times. She is also a member of *Social Planning Toronto*.

In recent years she has become interested in the concept of a *guaranteed living income* that would be universal, including all Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

In the end, Robyn is concerned to do what she can to further the development of a society of compassion, a world truly nourishing for our material well-being and our individual spirits.