

## **Making Your Voice Heard**

### ***How to get started***

Making the voices of educators heard in discussions of local, state, or national education policy is important for the education profession, educators, schools, districts, and students and to Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education. When you are ready to share your voice, participate in policy-development processes, and influence decision-making, think about your communication strategies.

- **Who Is Your Audience?** To whom will you be communicating? Knowing who the members of your audience are allows you to develop targeted and effective messages and saves you time and effort, while maximizing your reach. Identify the most influential individuals and/or administrative body involved and direct your message to that group. For example, to support the passage of a tax referendum that addresses budget shortfalls in the school district, build a message that speaks to businesses and individual members of your community. Possible audiences include: elected officials, journalists, school board members, civic associations, professional associations, teachers and administrators, and the business community.
- **How Do You Reach Your Target Audience?** With the key audience(s) defined, consider the most effective way to reach audience members. Though a message delivered in person, such as conducting a presentation at a school board meeting or before the education committee of your state legislators is the most powerful way to communicate, it may not always be possible. Submitting an editorial to your local newspaper and emailing elected officials are appropriate, efficient, and effective means to give awareness to a goal, concern, or issue. They support any next steps and can bring others into action. Other ways to convey your message include:
  - radio
  - direct mail, handouts, and flyers
  - telephone calls to key leaders.
  - Web sites, blogs, and other social media
  - banners and posters

Your communication strategies should include a schedule for contacting key audiences, deadlines affecting the timing and call-to-action for your messages and the topic it addresses, and costs associated with the various. When estimating costs, also analyze whether the methods chosen make the best use

of available resources to reach the most people. Mass media usually are the most effective for reaching the maximum number of people.

- **What is Your Message and How Do You Develop It?** In thinking about your audience, what is the goal of your message? What do you want the group to know and how do you want the individuals to feel? Do you want them to feel empowered, angry, concerned, or empathetic? Feelings motivate people to act.

In structuring your message remember that individuals remember anecdotes better than facts. Use effective anecdotes about your topic to support your intentions and goals for your message. When possible, focus on solutions and best alternatives and not the problem.

Other considerations to keep in mind as you develop your message include:

- What are your objections, and what will be your call to action? What do you want people to do?
- What is the key message? Can it be shared succinctly?
- Why is your message important to the audience?
- What facts support your message? Make sure your facts are accurate and up-to-date facts but don't overwhelm the audience with statistics. Personal stories representing figures gathered persuade the message.
- How well do you know the issues surrounding the context of your message? Prepare to be able to debate differing points of view. Respond confidently but avoid becoming defensive or reactive.

## Follow-Up

Share your message at all opportunities available, especially positive news and progress. After meeting with individuals or groups, write a thank-you note and offer to provide additional information.



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