

Slide 1



Communicating with the  
Grass Roots



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Slide 2

*"All politics is local"*  
-Thomas "Tip" O'Neill

*"An informed citizen is the  
guardian of our rights."*  
-Peter Kent, editorial page editor,  
Atlanta Journal



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Slide 3

Why Grass Roots?

- Elected officials care about what their constituents think
- Lawmakers need the votes of their constituents to get re-elected
- A grass roots program seeks to convince elected officials that there is significant local constituent support for your policy objective



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Slide 4

Grass roots efforts may involve:

- One-on-one and small group meetings,
- Generating large numbers of letters and/or phone calls to the lawmaker
- Phone calls and letters from influential constituents
  - personal friends, political supporters, major employers or other influential members of leaders of the community



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Slide 5

Grass roots efforts may involve:

- Informal contact with a legislator:
  - at social gatherings like political events, town meetings, and fundraisers
- Generating favorable media coverage:
  - such as news stories, editorials, and letters to the editor from leaders of business, professional and civic groups



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Slide 6

A successful grass roots program mobilizes both a "high quality" and a "significant quantity" of support



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Slide 7

Such "quality and "quantity"  
show lawmakers that:

- Influential constituents care a great deal about the issue
- A significant cross section of the community and a large number of voters support the issue



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Slide 8

In addition to having active individuals within BIA, you need the help of other organized groups!

And at times they will need you!



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Slide 9

Coalitions are useful and have potential for enormous influence in public policy and advocacy efforts



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Slide 10

A Coalition:

A group of people and organizations that agree to work together to achieve a particular policy goal.



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Slide 11

Potential members could include:

Persons with brain injuries  
Family members of persons with brain injuries  
Professionals in the field of brain injury including:

- Rehab professionals
- Providers
- Professionals from the medical field
- Representation from State Agencies
- Advocacy organizations that serve persons with disabilities

Other health and disability related organizations.



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Slide 12

List Potential Coalition Members in Your State

Which groups do you already have "membership" in?



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Slide 13

Coalitions Meet a Variety of Needs

- Oversee field services, or "operations" by recruiting new members
- Set up speakers bureaus
- Conduct petition drives
- Organize letter-writing campaigns
- Oversee media activity
- Develop budgets and raise monies for campaign events and activities



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Slide 14

Coalitions Meet a Variety of Needs

- Generate monies to cover the costs of an effective public relations campaign
- Generate support from the general public or policy makers
- Assist in organizational efforts such as developing fact sheets or information, creating communication networks to reach volunteers in a systematic and organized manner



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Slide 15

PHONING AND PHONE TREES



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Slide 16

Communication is Vital

- **Phone trees** are one effective way of communicating quickly and easily with volunteers and supporter
- They are quick and cheap
- Like other living things they do take some care and feeding



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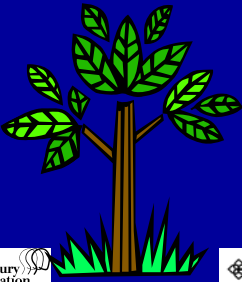
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Slide 17



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Slide 18

Phone Tree Basics

- Dependable people near the start (the root and trunk)
- Occasionally check the system with a test message
- Prune and graft where needed
- Have very clear policies about the purpose of the tree
- Ask for confirmation that calls have been made



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Slide 19

Postal Mailings

- Your mailings ("You Are Not Alone" Newsletter)
  - if you have the time and money
- Think about hitchhiking a free ride in others mailings (and reciprocate!)
  - List sympathetic newsletter

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Slide 20

E-Mailings

- Inexpensive, easy, often abuse.
- By asking for recipient to forward to others you gain exponential exposure.
- Use the Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) option to protect your list from spammers.

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Slide 21

USING ACTION ALERTS

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Slide 22

Action Alert:

A message that you send out via mail, fax or email asking for a specific action to be taken on a current advocacy issue.



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Slide 23

Action Alert Guidelines

- Specify and summarize exactly WHAT action you are calling for
- Establish authenticity
- Put a date on it
- Include clear beginning and ending markers.
- Beware of second-hand alerts
- Think about whether you want the alert to propagate at all



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Slide 24

Action Alert Guidelines

- Make Alerts self-contained
- Ask your reader to take a simple, clearly defined, rationally chosen action
- Make Alerts easy to understand
- Get your facts straight
- Start a movement, not a panic
- Tell the whole story
- Don't just preach to the converted



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Slide 25

Action Alert Guidelines

- Avoid righteous language
- Make it easy to read
- DO NOT use a chain-letter petition
- Urge people to inform you of their actions
- Don't overdo it - Avoid Action Alert Fatigue
- Do a de-brief
- Don't mistake mail, faxing and e-mail for organizing



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Slide 26

Exercises

- What informational material will you give people who are interested? Fact sheets, sample letters, petitions?
- Develop the "roots" of a phone tree for your advocacy efforts. What individuals or organizations can you count on to be the first contacts? What volunteers?



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