

WATER MESSAGES THAT MOBILIZE

DOs & DONT'S FOR ADVOCATES, COMMUNICATORS, & ELECTEDS



Attention is currency in today's information warfare landscape. If you're in the heat of an advocacy campaign, you do not have time for a public education gap.

Advocacy campaigns are not the same as long-term public awareness campaigns. A long-term strategy for some water groups should perhaps be a larger education effort. For those working toward shorter-term advocacy or electoral campaigns, your objective is finite - short-term - and the strategy cannot merely be public education but must motivate action with people for whom you will have seconds to reach and engage. Below is a quick summary of how to begin implementing lessons from the field and the polls today.

Do

Use this guide as a starting place for developing impactful voter engagement and advocacy campaigns

Repeat "clean, safe, reliable drinking water"

Remind people that all water is connected and pollution in rivers threatens their drinking water

Know your audience and who - specifically - you want to mobilize or neutralize. This includes doing an early opposition scan to know what opposition voices will line up to counter your message with voters and lawmakers.

Lead your message with a reminder that many cities and towns suffer from contaminated drinking water. Reference the problems in Flint (especially impactful in the Great Lakes region).

Cite local examples of water solutions and threats whenever possible.

Share stories of affected people and amplify impacted communities' organizing and messaging strategies.

Refer to safe drinking water as a "human right" with lower income voters and voters of color and a

“basic need” with conservative and white voters (especially conservative women)
Name your villains, including big polluters, corporate agriculture, factory farms, and corrupt politicians. (but stay away from villainizing family farms or community food producers)
Highlight messages of unity that counter attempts to pit cities against rural areas. Emphasize that water transcends political party or persuasion - everyone relies on clean, safe, reliable drinking water and the healthy rivers that provide most of it across the country.
Make voters the hero of your story with a bold inspiring call to action that meets the scale of the challenge you’ve identified.
Launch water-focused campaign brands separate from your organization or coalition.
Leverage earned media for legislative campaigns to speak directly to lawmakers and to specific political constituency groups (farmers, developers, communities of color, faith communities, etc)
Build paid media budgets that send clean water calls to action, as well as accountability ads, to low-income households, parents, moderate women, and 18-34-year-olds.
Always tell your victory story! If you win, make sure everyone knows it, and make sure the story builds momentum for your next campaign.

Don't
Assume you don't need your own polling, research, or message testing for the specific dynamics of your fight.
Lead with recreation, which is seen as a luxury, and is not convincing against opposition messages about farmers/ranchers and states' rights.
Make your message about saving the Clean Water Act or educating voters about its historic contributions.
Identify your audience as “the general public” unless you have a long-term campaign timeline and millions of dollars for public education alone.
Make your villains and their misdeeds the whole story, or over-inflate the perception of their power. This can make people who care feel defeated before the fight even begins!
Fall into any message traps that pit cities against rural areas, economy vs. environment, fish vs. farms, or one state against the other, etc.
Educate about <i>Sackett v EPA</i> . Messages about expanding clean water protections are stronger without additional education about the recent Supreme Court decision.