

WORKING WITH MEDIA

Earned/Traditional Media

One of the best ways to get your message across is through op-eds, as well as letters to the editor and appearances on radio and TV. You want to tailor your approach to the audience of that particular publication or outlet. An effective way to get your message to audiences is to tie your action to a breaking news event, e.g., when Tropical Storm Isais hit, it meant there was an appetite for information about disasters. Anniversaries of big events such as Hurricane Katrina can also be very valuable in attracting media attention. These events can range from anniversaries of U.S. Supreme Court decisions to a holiday with a connection to your issue.



Op-Eds: Published pieces are ideally 600-800 words. You want to tell a narrative that would be of interest to the reader, combined with a call to action. Op-eds allow you to get your message out to audiences directly and clearly — but the market for op-eds can be crowded. Newspaper editors can often reject submissions. However, op-eds are a powerful way to motivate your audience to action. [See our op-eds tips sheet.](#) It is easier to convince a newspaper to publish an op-ed if you, or the entity you represent, have a direct relationship with the newspaper editor, but this is not necessary. You can also cold submit ([see the New York Times help sheet](#)) If you want to solicit potential stories for use to draft an op-ed you can use a Google form and ask them the questions that someone can then finesse into a piece.

Letter to the Editor: A letter to the editor is in response to a piece published by that particular publication. They tend to be 200 words or less, either agreeing or disagreeing with the originally published piece. This is why it is critically important to create a [Google alert](#) that can allow for comment where you authentically connect it back to your own campaign. (Here's [how to create a Google Alert.](#)) [See Washington Post example.](#)

Radio/TV: This is one of the best ways to reach a wide audience. While you mostly control the narrative with op-eds and letters to the editor (they may be edited) with TV and radio you do not. This is an interview. While you will have conversations ahead of time with the relevant producer, the interviewer may ask unanticipated questions. You want to redirect them back to the conversation you wish to have. You can acknowledge their question and then say something to the effect of “but the thing that I think is important to remember is ...” so that you can redirect the interview (pivot) back to your own message.

Media to Amplify

When news stories, interviews, and panels are published about your action, use it to promote your campaign to your contacts and social media followers. As an example, the list below are some highlights of media generated by the JustUS Coordinating Council that we have amplified to raise awareness and garner more support/participation.

[America's Incarceration Rate Is About to Fall Off a Cliff](#)

[#JustUs Campaign Demands Emergency Plans for Prisons During COVID-19](#)

[Advocates Launch Campaign Demanding Protection for the Incarcerated During Emergencies](#)

[Decarcerate America Now](#)

["We're out here": Formerly incarcerated activists are bringing their voices to the DNC](#)

Digital Organizing

How to Build Power Online

During the COVID pandemic, we have all made a shift from in-person organizing to digital platforms. Our goals in digital organizing are threefold; building, engaging and activating communities. This method of communication has the ability to amplify our organizing beyond local networks and have a broader statewide or national reach, so where do we start?



Step 1: Name Your Goal & Stay Consistent

- Example: “For the #JustUs campaign, we are looking to put into law emergency management plans for people who are currently incarcerated”.
- When posting on social media, make sure your goal is always understood by your followers.
- Communicate your goal in a compelling way. Many stakeholders respond to pre-existing examples like natural disasters or recent events that illustrate the importance of policy recommendations. Others respond to facts related to agencies or programs missing the mark. Be sure to have data and quotes ready in case you need them for reference.
- Asks should be clear, research should come from reliable sources, and messaging should match [talking points](#).

Step 2: How Will You Leverage Media?

- If we livestream a rally, how can we use that at a later time? Can we send that to elected officials? Send to our ListServes?

Step 3: Who Are Your People?

- You know better than anyone the people who will engage with your online presence. What platforms are they using? What language/graphics/art can you use that will grab their attention?

These digital marketing tools offer a free, basic plan for starting out in social media:

Buffer, Later, Zoho Social, Hootsuite: social media management and analytics

Canva, Adobe Express: design graphics, videos, and more with free templates and stock images

Grammarly: free AI writing assistant, grammar checker, and editor

Bitly: shorten links and track clicks.

Calget: create “add to calendar” links for events

Mailchimp, Mailerlite, Brevo: email marketing and automation with templates

Let's Talk Platforms & Ways to Use for Best Impact:



Facebook currently has the largest number of users of all social media platforms.

Chances are, your audience has a FB page. Using this site allows you to post events, go live, create a FB group, and send direct messages. Leveraging FB groups you are already involved in is a quick way to get support for your campaign.



Instagram is a great platform for visual content. Engagement on this platform works a bit differently, however it can still be a powerful tool. Use the photos to capture excitement around your campaign. Short vertical videos called Reels (like TikTok videos) can be very effective. If your advocates are on Instagram, tag them! Use the Stories feature to tell followers about events, updates, and mini-wins.



TikTok is a space to upload short-form media clips and is popular with younger people. The platform enables people to connect a personalized political message to a broader political moment. Do not discount the use of this platform in engaging advocates who may otherwise go untapped.



YouTube is the second largest social media platform and the second largest search engine (after parent company, Google). Having your content on YouTube will help it get seen and discovered by a lot more people. Like TikTok and Instagram, YouTube has fully embraced short-form vertical videos, called Shorts on YouTube.



LinkedIn is more of a professional networking platform, but its user engagement has continued to grow and grow, making it an important platform to be on personally and also for sharing about your campaigns. If you have an organization or coalition, you might want to consider setting up a page specifically for that and making posts there instead of or in addition to your personal profile.



BlueSky is one of the newest social media platforms, but it is growing in user engagement and popularity, because it offers more user control over the experience through customizable algorithms and feeds, a more positive and less toxic environment compared to other platforms, and a decentralized, open-source framework that appeals to users seeking more freedom and independence. Skylight is also the video platform associated with BlueSky.

Important Notes on Social Media:

- Post consistent messages about your campaign from the [Social Media Toolkit](#).
- Send direct messages on Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok to those who are doing similar work and ask them to amplify your message.
- Re-post/share another organization's work that is similar and connect their issue to your campaign.
- Think through interesting ways to energize the base. For example, you may request that participants take a selfie with a piece of paper describing something that occurred and when and where they were with corresponding text about the issues involved.
- Algorithms/engagement
 - More engagement usually means your post will show up higher on your followers' feeds
 - Engagement = likes, comments, shares, clicks, etc.
 - Directly encourage sharing, commenting
 - Ask questions, encourage sharing to increase awareness of your issue
 - Bump up posts by posting them to your story
 - Hashtags #
 - Used to find things on specific topics, events, etc.
 - Can help garner engagement and reach target audiences
 - Can be used as campaign slogans/name
 - ex. #JustUs
- Live videos (protests, panel discussions, speeches by leaders, writers, activists, etc.) — opportunity for different type of engagement



Actions via Digital Platforms

Direct Actions, prior to COVID felt like the norm, however, we now live in a time where carrying out actions digitally is an opportunity to increase engagement, keep people safe and create a collateral that will live on for more than one moment in time. Choosing what platform, who your target audience is and your intended impact will vary, but here are some things to help in making those decisions:

- Call-to-Action Platforms: Platforms orgs can use to direct folks to take action online
 - Sign a letter, send a pre-written email, sign a petition
 - [JLUSA's #JustUs platform](#)
- Fully digital/phone-based advocacy day: Legislators are now accepting meetings through calls as many people are still working remotely.
 - You can schedule a two-day advocacy day but from the comfort of one's home.
 - The same rules apply as with a regular advocacy day, however, everyone is participating from the comfort of their home. There should be a designated "team leader" in each of the meetings.
 - To get people energized you can host a rally on a platform like Zoom where you have a run of show, potentially invite press, engage in chants, and demonstrate support for the issue.
- Town Halls/Panel Discussion: Opportunity for real-time conversation on your campaign, with the ability to share out recording after the event.
 - Choosing a platform based on your audience and goals

- Instagram Live, Zoom, Twitch, YouTube live, Facebook live, TikTok live
 - ex.) IG live might be better for mobilizing a younger audience, but not for including multiple people in your live event. Zoom might be better for having a panel discussion, etc.
- Have a plan
 - Assign clear roles — who will deal with tech issues, moderator, monitoring the chat, timing, etc.
 - Have an agenda/run of show including timing and lines on what to say labeled with speakers, if possible
 - Prep speakers!
- Phone-banking: While not technically “digital” this may feel more comfortable to a group that is not as tech-savvy. You provide the numbers of elected official’s offices (publicly available on their website)
 - Assign people to call groups of individuals.
 - Provide them with a script.
 - If you set a target time window you can do what is known as a call-zap. This is intended to flood an office with so many calls they are forced to acknowledge your issue.
 - You can promote the results of the call-zap on your social media.
- Coordinated Social Media Direct Actions (more specific directions included in the [social media toolkit](#)).

Social Media Toolkit

Social Media Toolkits offer a coordinated effort that works toward a specific goal using social media communications. When you create a toolkit it will be specific to your campaign goals and also provide a central place for those working with you to share out your message with ease and consistency. Below are some reasons social media toolkits are helpful:

- A set of information and tools for amplifying your message — rather than mainstream media outlets spreading the word, your audience can use their own social media to spread the word.
- Includes campaign/org goals, target audience, sample posts, logos, hashtags, graphics, [videos](#), etc.
- Creating and sticking to a brand
 - Staying on brand so that your posts are recognizable by viewers
 - Sticking to a few colors, fonts, and hashtags that represent your organization or campaign
 - Include your logo on your posts — when people share your posts, their audience will know where to go for more information.
- Seize and leverage the moment to build momentum — dates, anniversaries
- Making action/participation as easy as possible
- People will be more likely to interact with, share, and participate in your campaign if:
 - You give clear and concise instructions on action items:

- Who to contact, how to contact them, and what to say
- Which petitions to sign
- Ask audience to share campaign posts with specific hashtag(s)
- You stay organized!
 - Making a centralized Internet place for petitions, updates, etc.
 - Keeping a consistent message and brand that makes your campaign a reliable source

Sample Social Media Toolkit: As an example, [view the JCC Launch Social Media Toolkit](#). On Google Docs, you have the ability to make a copy of this toolkit and then edit the toolkit with your own state-specific campaign.