
Federal Election 2008 Tip Sheet for Nonprofits and Charities

Media

Local media play a critical role in bringing the concerns of Canada's charities and nonprofits into the election dialogue. Contact appropriate local journalists, editorials boards and radio hosts about issues of concern to your organization and to the community that are within the scope of the federal government. Journalists are often seeking exactly such coverage.

Develop a Media Plan

- Identify goals – what do you want people to know about your issues and concerns?
- Identify target audiences – who do you want to reach and what media will you use?
- Develop appropriate messages for each target audience – what actions are you asking them to take and why?
- Compile a media list – use your public library's media directory.
- Produce materials for a press kit – include a Media Advisory (1 page describing the event and inviting the media) and a Press Release (a mini news story describing how the issue affects the local community).
- Construct a timetable of outreach events and activities, consistent with local media deadlines.
- Evaluate yourself – have you been successful?

Get to Know Your Media Environment

- Become familiar with local news media – who has covered your issues in the past?
- Call local media outlets and ask who covers your issues. Tell them what you're doing and ask if they are interested in working with you on a local story.
- Contact your local cable programming and ask for their news and public affairs programs.
- Build media relationships – become a trusted resource to key journalists in your field.
- Invite reporters to cover events and offer to collaborate around a feature story.
- List events in community calendars in local media.
- Identify your best spokesperson to ask questions, call into talk shows and meet the press.



Submit an Op-Ed to your local newspaper

- Opinion Editorials or 'Op-Eds' provide an opportunity to make your argument at greater length than in a letter to the editor. An op-ed usually appears on or near the editorial section of a newspaper and is written by experts or invited members from the community, rather than by journalists. An op-ed generally carries more weight than a letter to the editor, not least because it allows you to develop your argument and present a more detailed case for your opinion.

Add New media to your communications campaign

- CBC has established 308 blogs – 1 per riding – <http://www.cbc.ca>. They are an important new vehicle for getting your message out to an increasingly varied demographic. Bloggers resent invasions of their communications space by "interested parties" so ensure comments come from diverse volunteers who know how to work effectively in this new media environment. The new political frontier!
- Radio phone-ins appear to be back in style, attracting a large listenership and a new currency in political circles. Encourage your members to call-in with their views.

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All-Candidates Meetings

Venue

Determine the boundaries of your riding at <http://www.elections.ca>. Be sure to choose a location that is accessible by both car and public transit and is fully accessible to people with disabilities. Under election financing laws, corporations and businesses can no longer make donations to political parties, including in-kind contributions such as free space. Think carefully about who is reserving the space and who will bear any costs or deemed costs. Have a back-up venue in the event of any last minute problems.

Dates

Select two or more possible dates to offer to each campaign to accommodate candidates' schedules, which book up well in advance. During in a 36-day campaign, you will need to plan your all-candidates' meeting as soon as possible after the writ is dropped.

Communication Tools

Debates are important events for candidates – they can reach large and active voting audiences and distinguish themselves from other candidates. Call the Campaign offices and speak to the campaign managers about the proposed event – email inboxes get flooded with hundreds of emails a day. Secure commitments from candidates who are less in demand to demonstrate that the event merits serious consideration by candidates facing high volumes of competing events. Be prepared to negotiate dates, times and formats, while remaining fair to all candidates.

Dealing with Rejection

All reasonable efforts should be made to attract *all* candidates – as the name of this event suggests! The refusal of a candidate to participate poses risks that require careful management, but should not necessarily mean that the event does not proceed. If a candidate chooses not to



participate, this must be communicated in a neutral way at the event by the moderator. Ensure that there is no perception of favouritism to a particular candidate or political party in accommodating competing schedules or communicating the absence of a candidate at an event. One option for missing candidates is to reserve a chair and place card with the candidate's name and party affiliation. Another is to allow candidates to send an alternate – however, electors want to hear from the candidates and not their staff or volunteers.

Getting People Out

It is essential that you promote your all-candidates' meeting. Try to attract diverse participation so candidates do not feel that the meeting was "stacked" with partisans or particular viewpoints. Standard promotional activities include emailing your members, posting information on your website as well as your members' sites, distributing and posting flyers in schools, seniors' homes, doing a mail box "drop" and exploring advertising rates with your local newspaper and broadcasters.

Running an All-Candidates' Meeting

Here is a typical format:

- Allow candidates to place their campaign literature in the room or just outside the room but ensures that the space is allocated equally among candidates so that those attending can gather additional information about each candidate and their positions on key issues.
- The moderator introduces the candidates, avoiding personal comments and allocating equal time to each.
- Candidates each have 4 minutes to introduce themselves and give an opening statement.
- The Moderator asks each candidate to comment on a range of predetermined questions. Sometimes these are given to all candidates in advance.
- The moderator then opens up the floor to questions.
- Sometimes, audience members write down their questions and submit them to the moderator to pose to all candidates. More often, audience members line up at a microphone and ask their questions.
- At the close of the allotted time for questions and answers, candidates have 3 - 4 minutes each for closing statements.
- The Moderator thanks the candidates for their time and adjourns the event.



Moderators must be experienced and non-partisan, with an ability to stay neutral, calm and firm. Media personalities often bring these qualities as well as excitement and professionalism to the event. Bilingualism should be a consideration in many communities. Timekeeper monitors pre-announced time limits on answers and courteously alerts and, where necessary, cuts off a candidate or questioner.

Unanticipated events

From time to time, questioners express lengthy or discourteous views as opposed to asking thoughtful questions, protesters arrive on the scene, candidates organize unexpected partisan activities, people arrive well after the event is underway, tempers flare, or your event otherwise unfolds very differently than imagined, perhaps under the glare of the media. Anticipate all such events and have a plan in place for dealing with each.

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Key Questions for Candidates

Possible questions from the Sector Platform

I. Tax Incentives to Stimulate Giving

An aging population and other societal changes are placing increased demands on charities to meet the needs of Canadians in their community. At the same time, there are indicators that current levels of charitable giving may be at risk.

Q. Have you or your Party considered the merits of a National Charities Strategy to ensure that our charities have the tools and resources to meet the expectations of Canadians in their communities?

II. Financing the work of Canada's Charities and Nonprofits

Federal grants are an important source of funding for Canada's charities and nonprofits.

Q. Have you or your political party considered changes to federal funding programs for charities and nonprofits, such as new forms of funding or tax measures that would improve the level of funding for Canada's charities and nonprofits?

III. Advocating for the needs of Canadians in their Communities

Recently, the Government of Canada introduced clauses into federal grants and funding agreements that prohibit the use of such funds to advocate or lobby any level of government about any issues related to the grant. For organizations such as health charities, advocating public policy positions arising out of research grants can be an important part of their work.

Q. Do you or your political party have any views on whether such clauses should form part of funding agreements with community organizations and other grant recipients?



Tips on Communicating with Candidates

- When speaking to your local candidates, it is essential to be non-partisan, brief and clear. Candidates cannot get into lengthy policy discussions at your front door. Also understand that candidates cannot be experts on every issue – offer to provide them with background information that is available to all the candidates and to follow-up with them when they have had a chance to consider the issue.
- Find out about all-candidates meetings in your community and attend with a question.
- Always be courteous and thank candidates for their time.

Related Resources

- ***How to Save the World in Your Spare Time*** (Key Porter Books, 2006) This recently published Canadian guide to political advocacy for community organizations was written by Elizabeth May, a long-time Canadian environmental activist.
- ***A Citizens' Guide to Lobbying*** (Norton, 1983). This 25-year old publication by US consumer activist Ralph Nader is now considered a classic in its field.
- ***Make Poverty History*** – <http://www.makepovertyhistory.ca/vote/kit>. This Website on anti-poverty advocacy provides practical tips on how community organizations can lobby for change.
- ***V3 Campaign*** – <http://www.v3campaign.org/new-site>. This site examines tools used in the US 'Independent Sector' to lobby politicians during election campaigns.