

RNC STATE PARTY STRATEGIES

COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE FOR COUNTY PARTIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

Introduction

05

Best Practices

07

Key Terms

11

**Building a
Communications
Plan**

13

**Building a
Communications
Foundation**

21

**Intermediate
Communications
Shop**

27

**Advanced
Communications
Shop**

31

Conclusion

33

Reference Documents



INTRODUCTION

Communication(s) in its simplest form is transmitting thoughts, ideas, and information back and forth. Communications is a broad term that has different implications depending upon the area it's being used in. For our purposes, we'll be discussing political communications, or comms for short. There are characteristics of political communications that overlap with other communications specialties (for example, corporate communications), but there are also distinct differences such as vocabulary, press engagement, earned media, and voter outreach. If you've worked in communications within a career outside of politics, there's a steep learning curve when entering political communications.

Political communications has one end goal - influencing voters through the press and media to win elections. Relationships with reporters are essential to being able to place stories and get your side of the story heard. This might sound simple, but the process is full of landmines if you aren't familiar with the terms being used. Unless otherwise specified and agreed upon, a reporter can quote everything you say in their articles.

In order to persuade the public and correct the wrongs told by the opposition, you first must have effective messaging. Writing is an art that when done correctly allows the reader or listener to easily understand and engage with what they are being told. Writing and distributing talking points falls under the purview of communications. Talking points should be in the form of simple language so everyone can grasp the concept while also offering detailed facts and numbers when possible. Most importantly, talking points should be topical and relatable. They help voters realize why certain issues should be important to them. Developing talking points is an essential part of communications and should be done in all communications departments no matter the size or scope. Messaging is one of the basic building blocks necessary for the content of press releases, op-eds, social media posts, rapid responses, and interview preparation.

We are here to provide you with everything you need to know so you can run an effective communications shop - including how to build relationships with reporters and pitch stories to drive messaging to outlets across print, TV, and radio platforms. If you follow the recommendations included in this guidebook, your party should become more effective communicators and avoid getting burned by the press.



BEST PRACTICES

The RNC wants to help all county parties grow their Communications operations. Each county party has different abilities, but we want to enable them to improve as much as possible. Some communications shops only have volunteers, while others are fully staffed with experienced professionals. Either way, the RNC has resources that can be useful to all. We have summarized the progression of a comms shop from beginner to advanced below.

1. Building a Communications Foundation

- The county party is developing press contacts, engaging with the press, and establishing a social media presence.

2. Intermediate Communications Shop

- The county party is gaining earned media and developing a rapid response plan

3. Advanced Communications Shop

- The county party is hosting bracketing events, collaborating with surrogates, and engaging regularly with supporters.

Before you dive into learning more about the three stages of developing a comms shop, here are a few important comms operations that should be established from the start to ensure all of your communications efforts run as smoothly as possible.

- First, identify your state party's primary spokesperson and the person on your team who is responsible for receiving and responding to any incoming press inquiries.
- Identify who is responsible for drafting and sending out content (press releases, tweets, social media posts, newsletters, etc.) on behalf of the state party.
- Identify who needs to sign off on official content posted by the state party on social media or the state party's website.



KEY TERMS

The following is a list of terms, phrases, and acronyms used in this document and communications or press-related operations, particularly when dealing with the press. They are loosely grouped by their subject - media, press, and press events, and they are ordered by relative complexity.

Media

Channels (verbal, nonverbal, etc.): These are the ways you transmit messages and graphics to the public. The most frequently used social media channels/platforms include: Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube. Email platforms include those like Constant Contact and Mailchimp. There are many other channels or platforms that may apply to the messaging landscape in your state.

LTE (Letter to the Editor): This stands for “letter to the editor.” Producing letters to the editor is an easy way to engage local party leaders and activists to amplify your messaging and reach a larger audience. LTEs can respond to a recent news article or event by providing a local’s perspective. LTEs can be further amplified via your county party communications operation and leveraged to create an impression of widespread support for or opposition to an issue.

Op-Ed (Opposite the Editorial Page): This stands for “opposite the editorial page.” Op-eds are written by notable figures or experts to educate members of the public about an issue beyond what the media may have been covering independently. Op-eds are about message control, exposure, awareness, and image-building.

Press

“Off the record,” “On the record,” and “On background”

- A good general rule is to never say anything in the presence of a reporter that you don’t want to see on the cover of the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*.
- An “on background” quote may be printed, but your name should not be used. You may be quoted as “a member of Chairman X’s staff,” according to the reporter’s purposes or an agreed-upon arrangement.
- Information provided “off the record” will not be printed. The reporter and editors will use the information in their inquiries, and it may help them build a story.
- Reminder – There is considerable confusion and disagreement within journalism about the meanings of these rules. You must clarify the ground rules with the reporters you work with before the information is given. Either over the phone or in an email, clarify at the very beginning whether the information you are providing the reporters is “off the record” or “on background” to avoid confusion or misreporting.



Off the Record: The act of providing information to the press on the basis that it will not be used in any way. A reporter will need to get corroboration from a second source.

On the Record: Everything you say can be reported and your name will be cited.

On Background: The reporter can quote what you say, but it won't be attributed directly to the source's name. Example: "On background from a RNC spokesperson." Sometimes reporters speak to sources on-background so they can build information for a story. It's not always a direct quote.

Press Release: An official announcement delivered to the press for media coverage that covers a specific event, press conference or a major news story impacting the party.

Press Statement: This is an official quote from the state party provided to the press. It can be sent as a Tweet, in an email to a list of reporters, or an email responding to a single reporter requesting a statement or comment on a specific issue.

Pitch: This is the process of reaching out to a reporter or producer and requesting an interview for your Chairman, spokesperson, or a surrogate.

Exclusive: Offering first-look information, a story, or an op-ed with a single, usually major media outlet. This means that the information or product won't be shared with any other outlets until the original outlet has shared their story.

Embargo: This is the process of sharing relevant information with the media that cannot be published before an agreed upon time.

Press Events

Gaggle: An informal off-camera briefing with the press that is on the record.

Pull Aside: A reporter can request a spokesperson to step to the side briefly and speak to them 1x1 on a particular issue.

Bracketing (to bracket): This is the tactic of scheduling local press events before and after an opponent's appearance in a given media market to help dilute the influence of the opponent's message and earn coverage for your party.

DMA (Designated Market Area): DMA stands for "Designated Market Area," and is also referred to as a media market, media region, or broadcast market. The DMA rank is a metric used to prioritize media markets by the size of their TV and radio audiences. For example, the Nielsen DMA rankings for 2020 provide the most accurate and up-to-date portrayal of current radio and television markets. The DMA rankings are based on the population of each surveyed market region.



Other Key Terms

Pundit: This is someone who is a subject matter expert or source of opinion in a specific field. A political pundit will offer commentary to the media on a particular subject area that they are knowledgeable in.

Surrogate: This is someone who speaks or acts on the behalf of a party or a candidate running for some sort of political office. Surrogates often appear at public events when someone from a political party cannot attend or may simply appear to bolster the image of a party or candidate. Surrogates can also be subject matter experts who can speak to certain issue areas at events.



BUILDING A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

It's important to have a communications plan because it will serve as a base for your entire communications operation. It will guide you and keep you on track to achieve your party's goals. It can also help you plan your content, which will save you time and confusion in the long run. When wondering if a task is in line with the message you want to put forth, you can always come back to your comms plan to see if the task fits within the parameters outlined in your original and approved goals. The communications plan is something every county party should have no matter the level of expertise. Although you may not be able to fill in every section at first, it's something you can go back to and fill out as you progress as a party. It also helps to keep your communications shop on track and decide what your next steps should be as you build your comms shop and team.


Determine:

- Goals for the party
- Topline messaging for the party
- Why should voters in your state vote for Republicans?

Build:

- List of Republican candidates and elected officials in your county.
 - Include a photo and short summary highlighting their priorities.
- List of Democrat candidates and elected officials in your county who you are planning to target this cycle.
- Social Media Plan
 - How many times do you plan to post on X, Facebook, and Instagram every day? Remember shares and retweets.
Identify how many followers you currently have on Facebook, X, and Instagram as a benchmark.
 - Where can you incorporate graphics? Do you have graphics from your State Party that can be utilized, or do you need to create a new graphic?
 - www.canva.com is a great resource to easily create graphics online.
 - Remember to highlight holidays and notable dates (You will learn more about this under the "Social Media" section below).
 - Follow all GOP officials in your state on your social media channels to ensure you do not miss any important content, and retweet/share with your followers.
- Surrogate List
 - Work with your party and key stakeholders to build a list of surrogates.
 - Surrogate lists should consist of elected officials, local/county officials, activists, business owners, and people who can speak to certain policies (An example can be found under Advanced Communications Shop - Surrogates).



The background is a solid red color. It features a pattern of white stars and chevrons. The stars are of various sizes and are scattered across the upper half of the image. The chevrons are arranged in a series of horizontal rows, with each row containing a different number of chevrons, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is a dynamic and patriotic design.

BUILDING A COMMUNICATIONS FOUNDATION

If you are starting from scratch, have had a recent leadership change or staff turnover: start here. It can also be useful for more experienced county parties to review their communications and press operations every cycle to see where there is room for improvement.

To build a strong communications shop, you should establish a press list and utilize Facebook, X, and Instagram as frequently as possible to get your message out to voters. If you don't have an updated press list, you can find a sample press list under the Reference Documents section, but in the meantime here's how to get started:

- **Creating a Media Contact List:** Your press list should consist of members of the press, journalists, print reporters, radio hosts, TV bookers/hosts. The list should include the reporter or journalist's name, the outlet, type of outlet (print, television, or radio), the reporter or journalist's email address and phone number, the news outlet's Media Market (DMA), the city of the newsroom, in case you need to visit the studio, and a section for notes. As always, you should continue to grow this list throughout the cycle.
- **Remember: Reporters are people too!** Reach out to reporters to meet for coffee/drinks, send regular emails, touch base with them over the phone, or schedule weekly check-in calls. For instance, if you're looking for background information on a specific topic or more knowledge, you should be calling your reporters regularly to check in with them and see if they've heard anything about what you're looking into further.
 - Example: President Biden is holding events in battleground states around the country. When we check in with reporters, we ask them if Joe Biden has done an interview with them yet, so in case he hasn't we can set up a surrogate to respond to their event.
- **Keep in contact with reporters.** You should be in communication with local reporters and pitching them new ideas and stories to write about. Your pitches can be about local or county level policy issues Republicans are pushing, lies Democrats have said, or an upcoming event you will have a speaker at, but remember, make sure it's something newsworthy and timely.
- **Pro Tip: Don't be scared.** Press is free advertising – it allows you to message voters without paying for expensive advertising. It's up to us to provide a counter argument to leftist propaganda. The media is already left-leaning, so we can't trust them to provide a balanced view of the issues at-hand.



Facebook:

- Facebook makes it easy to engage with voters by posting live videos and photos. You should use it to drive people to take action.
- When drafting content for Facebook posts, keep your message to 400 characters or less.
- Be sure to tag any relevant stakeholders or organizations that you mention in the post.
- We recommend posting to Facebook between 2-5 times per day – this includes shares and reposts.
- Your posts can be focused on the following:
 - **Fundraising** – provide opportunities for individuals to donate money. Push people to visit your website.
 - **Informing the audience** – who are you and what do you stand for?



X (Formerly Twitter):

Your party's X account is considered an official voice of your organization.

How often should you tweet?

- You should aim to tweet or "post" original content every day.
- Retweet others if it's relevant to the party. For example, share tweets from the RNC, state/local elected officials, other county parties, Members of Congress, etc.
- **Remember: Tweeting good content consistently is more important than tweeting for the sake of tweeting.**



- How to use X?
 - A tweet is 280 characters or less. When drafting a tweet, you should use a mix of plain text and visuals in your posts (e.g. images and gifs).
 - Use the “@” symbol to tag any relevant individuals or organizations in your posts.
- Keep in mind, X is very public, so your tweets can be interpreted as official statements to the press.

Instagram:

- Instagram is another frequently used channel that is also an effective tool to help your county party build and grow your brand.
- You should utilize Instagram to post pictures and videos from press conferences, town halls, campaign events, and protests or bracketing events, as well as pictures of volunteers or candidates out in the field.
- Instagram captions should be 100-150 characters. It’s recommended that you post a few times a week but no more than once a day.
- Make sure your posts are relevant and appealing to your target audience.

Social Media Calendar:

If you don’t have one already, you should build a social media calendar of holidays and important dates that you can post pictures, graphics, and messaging for on social media.

- What should the calendar include?
 - Holidays, jobs numbers days, campaign events (Republicans and Democrats), and campaign deadlines (filing deadlines, voter registration deadlines, early or mail-in voting).
- In addition to creating a calendar in Microsoft Word or Excel, you can also set up calendar invites to remind staff about holidays and notable dates that should be highlighted on your social media channel to ensure content is created.



Increasing Views and Creating Content

- You should develop an authentic voice in your original Facebook posts and tweets, rather than only copying and pasting what others have posted or shared.
- You should share engaging pictures and videos from events, fundraisers, meetings, and volunteers assisting at campaign events.
- Utilize hashtags (#) on both Facebook and X to gain the attention of people outside of your follower base, but do not use more than 1 to 2 per post/tweet. A hashtag is a label commonly used on social media to find messages with specific content. Individuals create and use hashtags by placing the # before a word or unspaced phrase, either in the main text or at the end.
 - For example: #LeadRight, #SaveAmerica, #VoteRepublican

Pro Tips for Social Media

Before we move on to messaging and talking points, here are a few tips on social media that you should always be cognizant of whether you are building a new communications shop or operating with an advanced team of communications experts. These are good tips and tricks to keep in mind whenever you are engaging with the press or sharing content on social media.

- An easy way to get information out is to encourage your followers to “like or share” your posts and tweets with their followers.
- It’s important to post your content, especially pictures, on all your social media platforms. Your followers might only follow you on one channel, not all of them.
- Use your party’s talking points to help draft and create content for social media posts.
- Don’t engage with or get into fights with antagonists who try to provoke you into posting negative messages. You should always stay positive rather than get into arguments.
- Never engage with the press or reporters on your party’s social media accounts unless you are an official spokesperson. Remember, your posts are tied to the reputation of the party.



Engaging With The Press: There are a lot of ways to engage with the press. For instance, if you're hosting an event (e.g. press conference, town hall, bracketing event, etc.), you should email an invitation to members of your press list. If you want to comment on a national story or a story in your state or county, you can reach out to the appropriate reporter letting them know your county party or Chairman is available for a comment or you're willing to provide a quote on behalf of the county party. Here are a few other ways to engage with the press as well:

1. Press Releases: a press release is an important tool to share information, gain news coverage, and help shape your state party's press narrative with journalists and members of the press. Press releases can also help you land coverage in major publications. Press releases should be sent after an event, press conference, a major news story impacting the state party, or a GOP legislative advancement in the state. Here's how to build a press release:

- **Subject Line**
 - The subject line of your press release should be short, unique, and catch the reader's attention.
- **Body**
 - The press release itself should be short and succinct. Get rid of any words that won't add value to the reader.
 - Be sure to incorporate any pertinent background information.
 - Make sure the content is timely and newsworthy.
 - Two to three quotes is plenty - you don't want it to appear cluttered.
- **Formatting**
 - Putting "For Immediate Release" on your press release header lets the journalist know that the information can be immediately distributed.
 - If you want to share embargoed information with a journalist before your event or a press conference, put the words "Embargoed Until..." with the date and time the embargo ends.
 - Tip: When sending a press release, the press release itself should be in the body of an email, not included as an attachment.
- **Press Release Header**
 - Your logo should be at the top of the page in high resolution.
 - Clearly identify when the material should be released (ie. "For Immediate Release" or "Embargoed")
 - The title should be in all capital letters, short, and attention grabbing.
 - Don't forget to include contact information at the top of your press release - including name, title, phone number or email address. Journalists shouldn't have to go digging to find out how to contact you if they have any follow-up questions or would like to inquire about working with your party on an exclusive piece based on a quote you included in your press release.
 - If your county party's logo is unclear, you can also write out the name of your county party in the header.



Press Release Example

MICHIGAN  REPUBLICANS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Tony Zammit

517-487-5413

tzammit@migop.org

Why Won't Whitmer Deny Boat Incident?

LANSING, Mich., May 26, 2020 – Last night, the [Detroit News](#) reported allegations that Governor Gretchen Whitmer's husband Marc Mallory attempted to use his wife's office to gain a special favor from a Northern Michigan business owner. When told that the company would not be able to place the couple's leisure boat into the water due to a backlog caused by Whitmer's shutdown, Mallory allegedly responded, "I am the husband to the governor, will this make a difference?"

The shocking allegations come after Whitmer spent last week encouraging Michiganders to forgo unnecessary trips to the region, stating in a press conference, "[If you don't live in one of the regions think long and hard before you travel to one of those regions.](#)"

Additionally, [Crains Magazine](#) reported, "The governor also discouraged downstate residents from traveling Up North this weekend." Quoting Whitmer as saying, "Don't descend on Traverse City from all regions of the state."

Thus far, Whitmer's administration has not denied the allegations as Whitmer spokesperson Tiffany Brown stated she wouldn't address, "every rumor that is spread online."

"Apparently, Gretchen Whitmer is a perfect fit for the Biden ticket. After all, both have immediate family members who try to use their political office to gain special favors." said Michigan Republican Party Chairman Laura Cox, referencing Joe Biden's son, Hunter, who allegedly was hired to the board of a Ukrainian energy company due to his father's role as Vice President. Cox continued, "There can't be two sets of rules, one for the people of Michigan and another for the Governor. Gretchen Whitmer needs to confirm or deny these allegations immediately."

###

Paid for by the Michigan Republican Party with regulated funds.
Not authorized by any candidate committee
525 Seymour Avenue, Lansing, MI 48933



Surrogates

Another important aspect of a strong Communications operation is building a surrogate list. Using surrogates allows your message to reach a wider audience since more people will be speaking with the press and participating in messaging such as Op-Eds and LTE's. Surrogates often appear at public events when someone from a political party cannot attend, or may simply appear to bolster the image of a party or candidate. Surrogates can also be subject matter experts who can speak to certain issue areas at events. Below you will learn how to build a surrogate list if your county party doesn't have a surrogate list on file already. Later in the document, you will also learn how to collaborate with your surrogates as your county party's Communications shop becomes more advanced.

Building a Surrogate List:

- Work with your state party and key stakeholders to build out a list of surrogates.
- Surrogate lists should consist of elected officials, local/county officials, activists, business owners, and people who can speak to certain issue areas.
 - Identify which surrogates are best for which issues.
- All surrogates must go through vetting unless they're a statewide elected official. You should work with your state party to get all their personal information over to the RNC, who will provide a vetting report at no cost.

First Name	Last Name	DMA	District	Title
John	Albers	Atlanta	SD-56	State Senator
Mike	Dugan	Atlanta	SD-30	Senate Majority Leader
Thuy	Hotie	Atlanta	N/A	District 1 Manager, Gwinnett County GOP, APA for Trump Board Member
Ginger	Howard	Atlanta	Statewide	Women for Trump National Advisory Board Member & RNC Committeewoman
Alveda	King	Atlanta	N/A	Women for Trump National Advisory Board Member
John	King	Atlanta	Statewide	Insurance Commissioner
Bruce	Levell	Atlanta	N/A	POTUS Advisor, RNC Media Surrogate, NDC Trump
Sharon	Levell	Atlanta	N/A	Black Voices for Trump National Advisory Board Member
Barry	Loudermilk	Atlanta	GA-11	Congressman
Ray	Martinez	Atlanta	N/A	Loganville Mayor
Lauren "Bubba"	McDonald	Atlanta	District Four of t	Chairman of the Georgia Public Service Commission
Madgie	Nicolas	Atlanta	N/A	Black Voices for Trump National Advisory Board Member
Tricia	Pridemore	Atlanta	District Five of t	Georgia Public Service Commissioner
David	Ralston	Atlanta	HD-07	Speaker of the House
Ralph	Reed	Atlanta	N/A	Chairman, Faith & Freedom Coalition / Fmr. GA GOP Chair
David	Shafer	Atlanta	N/A	GA GOP Chair
Bruce	Thompson	Atlanta	SD-14	State Senator
Jason	Thompson	Atlanta	N/A	RNC Committeeman
Julianne	Thompson	Atlanta	N/A	Women for Trump National Advisory Board Member
Sunny	Wong	Atlanta	N/A	Activist
Lynn	Westmoreland	Atlanta	N/A	Former Congressman
Jody	Hice	Atlanta/Augusta	GA-10	Congressman
Orew	Ferguson	Atlanta/Columbus	GA-08	Congressman
Rick	Allen	Augusta	GA-12	Congressman
Jodi	Lott	Augusta	HD-122	State Representative



INTERMEDIATE COMMUNICATIONS SHOP

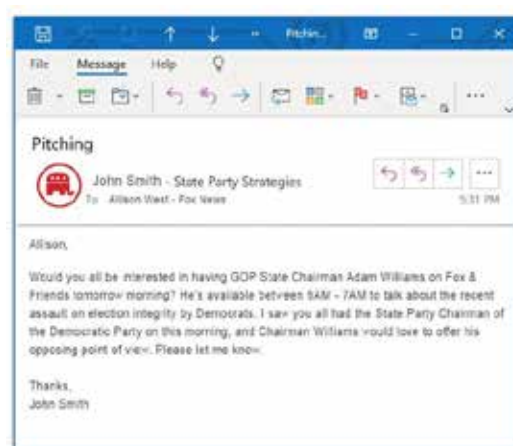
Once you have a solid foundation, we recommend beginning to focus on the influence you can have over the press and the media. As mentioned before, political communications has one end goal – influencing voters through the press and media to win elections, so it's important to continually build relationships with reporters and maintain a strong social media presence. By doing so, this will help your county party get stories placed and ensure your side of the story is heard. Below we have included some ways to pitch interviews, gain earned media, prepare for TV and radio interviews, develop rapid response plans, and monitor the news.

Importance of pitching interviews:

- Everyone wants to have their voice heard, so if you want to get on TV or radio you have to pitch ideas and stories to reporters. When you pitch an interview, remember that you are competing against other Republicans, Democrats, surrogates, and individuals for air time.
- Pitching is a skill that will require you to think creatively and share a story idea that will benefit both the reporter and the audience. As your Communications shop advances, you should pitch interviews regularly.
- Remember, pitching an interview to one reporter might not land you an interview the first time around. You should be communicating with several reporters at a time, pitching them your story and why you or your spokesperson is the best person to speak on a subject.

How to pitch an interview:

- Email (see example below) and then follow-up with a phone call.
- Be specific on the topics your principal is available to discuss. Make sure they are timely.
- Explain why it relates to the topics they've been covering lately.
- Explain why your principal is the best voice on the subject matter.



TV Interview Preparation:

- If you're participating in an interview in a TV studio, you likely won't see the person asking the questions. You'll be sitting in front of a large TV screen and there will be a studio director to count you down. Keep your eyes on the camera.
- Remember: from the moment you're on camera and receive an earpiece to the moment you leave the room or the studio, everything is on the record.
- If you're participating in an interview in a TV studio where the host is in-person with you, be careful of small-talk. The host could bring up these topics on the air. Everything you say, even if you're not on the air, is on the record.
- Make sure you know if the interview is live or recorded. Most of the time, a booker will let you know whether it's going to be live or recorded from the beginning.
- Zoom/In-office studio tips:
 - Make sure the camera is at eye level and you're not looking down. Maintain eye contact with the camera. Avoid swaying and looking around.
 - Invest in a quality webcam (at least 1080p), microphone, and LED light.
 - Only use an earpiece in one ear and make it as inconspicuous as possible.
 - If using Zoom, be mindful of the background.

Radio Interview Preparation:

- Landlines work the best.
- Be sure you are dialing-in from a reliable, quiet space. Try to avoid calling into a radio interview while you're in a car.
- Radio interviews usually last 10-15 minutes and they tend to be more informal than TV.
- Remember: beware of casual chatting with the host during commercial breaks. They can mention your conversation after your radio hit.

Other Tips:

- Before you go on the air, research the journalist's interests, perspective, and biases by browsing their Twitter page.



- Be a resource – if you can't do the interview, help them find someone who can.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, offer to follow-up with them.
- Avoid “umms, uhhhs, etc.” – instead, take a moment to pause and collect your thoughts.

Gaining Earned Media:

Earned media is great because it's free, but you have to work for it. You have to draft content for X, press releases, and newsletters, and you also have to invest time into building relationships with reporters and journalists so that they write stories about your county party, Chairman, or surrogates.

From a financial standpoint, earned media can help your budget stretch a lot further, but remember, you have to invest time into building positive relationships with local reporters. You can gain earned media by appearing on your local TV stations, participating in a local radio interview or podcast, you can publish an Op-Ed or send a letter to the editor, or you can pitch a story to a journalist and provide a quote to be included.

Why is earned media important?

The media is an important outlet for county parties to communicate their messages to the public. Earned media can help your party reach a target audience without needing to use paid media channels.

- **Newspaper Articles:** You should always be working with newspaper/print reporters and frequently building up relationships with your county's political reporters. Send out products that you think they're likely to pick up. If they write a story about something relevant to the Republican Party in your state or county, you can send a quote and request an update.
- **TV Interviews:** You should likewise be in constant contact with TV station producers, anchors, and reporters to try to book TV interviews for your spokesperson, surrogates, and your incumbents/candidates as often as possible.



- **Radio Interviews:** You should be contacting radio show hosts and producers to book your spokesperson and surrogates as often as possible.
- **Op-Eds:** Op-eds are offered to educate members of the public about an issue, beyond what the media may have been covering independently. Use your surrogates to sign op-eds that you write about a specific subject. Follow the op-ed guideline restrictions in your local newspapers, as most op-ed submissions have maximum word counts, typically around 500-600 words.



- **Letters to the Editor (LTEs):** Work with your State Party to find people in your county to sign letters to the editor. You should aim to have 2 to 3 LTEs published per quarter. If you want to do a large push around a vote or event, a mass scale LTE push will be beneficial to you.



Rapid Response

Developing a rapid response plan can take some time and planning, but it is important to incorporate it into your communications plans as your county party advances. Rapid response is usually done during important events (example: debates, State of the Union) or breaking news. It's important to get people short and concise updates on what's being said and done. Rapid response is often done through social media (X) so it's widely available and shareable. **The RNC Research Twitter account** is a great resource for Rapid Response content

How to prepare:

- Draft quotes and hits around primary debates and events your opponents are hosting. Find one key vulnerability of your opponent and focus on it.
 - For example, if your opponent or a member of the opposition party says something that isn't true, then call it for what it is, and be sure to back your claim up with sources.
- You can use rapid response to define your opponent and their campaign.
- You should also compile supporting materials to put your rapid response plan together, materials may include: research, fact sheets, or articles.



- **Offensive Opportunities:** News of the day, something your opponent says during an interview, and debates.
- **Defensive Opportunities:** A bad news story, debates, opponent attack, gaffes.
- **The Simple Truths:**
 - Remember that reporters can be lazy, so make it easy for them.
 - Reporters also have short attention spans, so be short and get to the point.
 - Reporters are also constantly bombarded with calls, emails, and requests, so be creative as much as possible.



ADVANCED COMMUNICATIONS SHOP

Again, whether you have a full-time communications staffer or a super-volunteer, once your county party has successfully laid the foundation for a robust, operational communications shop and is able to do everything laid out thus far on a daily or weekly basis, it's time to begin collaborating with surrogates, hosting press conferences and press calls, creating media advisories, and bracketing your opponent's events. Below we will lay out how to accomplish each of those tasks and help elevate your county party's Communications operations to another level of expertise.

Surrogates

- **Messaging:** Every week, the RNC's Regional Communications team sends out state party packets, also referred to as a 'Regional Rundown' with important messaging, graphics, and materials for your state party's use. You should be sharing this national messaging as well as any state-specific messaging you compile with your surrogate list regularly.
- **Events:** You will be using surrogates for events frequently. After your surrogate list is built out, you want to get to the point where you can put a press conference together in 24 hours in any pocket of your county with a surrogate lined up to speak and the press in attendance to cover it.

Bracketing (Counter Programming)

Bracketing is the tactic of scheduling local press events before and after an opponent's appearance in a given media market to dilute the influence of the opponent's message and earn coverage. It is designed to directly counter an opponent's scheduled event. Bracketing is everywhere that campaigns, parties, and outside groups want to make their speeches, press conferences, and ads. Bracketing is important for county parties because it allows the party to get their voice heard and hold the press accountable. Bracketing is done with surrogates in local media.

Street Theater: When opponents hold events, you can gather volunteers to perform street theater outside of their event on public property to capture the attention of reporters attending the event in an effort to counter program their event.

Example:

Claire McCaskill's nickname in 2018 was "Air Claire" so they had an aircraft marshal "wave" McCaskill into her event.



Theme based:

- Similar to Former Senator Claire “Air Claire” McCaskill, you can develop a running theme for your opponent and use that for bracketing purposes.
 - Example: President Trump called former Indiana Senator Joe Donnelly “Sleepin’ Joe” at a May 10, 2018 rally in Elkhart, Indiana.
- The RNC created a Sleepin’ Joe Twitter account and created a “Sleepin’ Joe” costume consisting of a sleeping bag and pillow. Every time Donnelly had an event, Sleepin’ Joe would show up.

BRACKETING EXAMPLE: President Joe Biden is set to visit N.C. State University in Raleigh, NC in five days to talk about his Administration’s success so far and campaign for Democrats in the state.

- **Five days out:** Contact your surrogate list and see who is available to participate in a bracketing event the day President Biden visits Raleigh.
- **Four days out:** Develop talking points that counter what Biden will be speaking about. Send the talking points to the surrogate group. Acquire a permit (if needed) for the place where the press conference will take place.
- **Three days out:** Send out a media advisory (See the Sample Media Advisory in the Reference Documents) to reporters telling them about the press conference. Send a follow-up email to the press asking if they’ll be in attendance and asking them the important questions they should ask Biden.
- **Two days out:** Host a call with surrogates to talk about the plan and talk through messaging. Create posters and props for surrogates to hold during the press conference. Schedule radio interviews for the morning of the event.
- **One day out:** Follow up with each reporter/news desk and see if they plan on attending the press conference. Remind them of the inconsistencies, hypocrisies, and broken promises the Biden Administration has been avoiding. Try to get reporters from each DMA to attend the press conference.
- **The day of:** The Communications Director calls reporters that morning to see if they plan on attending Biden’s event. Ask if they are also going to attend the state party’s press conference beforehand. A few hours before President Biden is set to speak, the surrogates and the state party’s Communications Director gather outside the complex where Biden will be speaking.



Note: You won't always have five days to schedule a bracketing event. Sometimes you'll have two weeks and sometimes you'll have two days, but the example above is a general planning guideline. Especially in the height of campaign season, it's important that you have a surrogate list in place and the infrastructure built for strong volunteer efforts.



CONCLUSION

Throughout this guidebook we have described the terminology of political communications, discussed how to build a communications shop, engage with the press, and advance to influencing the voters in your county. Communications is an integral part of politics if you want to win elections and explain to voters why it's important to vote for Republicans up and down the ballot. As you learned in this document, Communications is manifested in many ways, whether it's through social media outlets or holding press conferences to answer questions from voters in your county.



The background is a solid red color. It features a pattern of white stars and chevrons. The stars are of various sizes and are scattered across the upper half of the page. The chevrons are arranged in a series of horizontal rows on the left side, pointing to the right. The overall design is clean and modern.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Reference Documents



2019 Republican Party of Kentucky Communications Plan

Overview

Kentucky is one of only 3 states with constitutional officer elections in 2019 – including the only incumbent GOP governor seeking reelection.

Goals:

- Re-elect Governor Matt Bevin and GOP incumbents and nominees to all statewide constitutional offices
- Build and grow the GOP brand in Kentucky to contribute to successful re-election of Senator McConnell, general assembly supermajorities, and securing 8 electoral college votes for President Trump in 2020

Communications should contribute to these goals by sharing the accomplishments and vision of GOP candidates and elected officials with the public and holding the Democrats accountable for failures, misdeeds, and extremism.

Republicans are moving the state forward with pro-growth, conservative reforms that are reversing decades of failed Democrat control. Democrats, funded by out-of-state billionaires and extremist special interest groups, want to turn Kentucky into a failed, bankrupt liberal paradise like California.

Topline Messaging

To win in 2019, Kentucky Republicans must effectively draw a clear contrast between RPK's candidates' pro-growth, conservative reforms that are moving our state forward with an increasingly radical and extreme national Democrat party – while recalling the Democratic failures of the past – failing schools, bloated government, a stagnant economy and more.

At every turn, messaging from RPK, its candidates, and to the best extent possible, its external surrogates and allies must point to this momentum and draw a clear contrast with the liberal Democrats who want to turn back the clock and reverse Kentucky's momentum.

Messaging also needs to reflect communities' values – in small-town, rural, GOP-leaning areas, voters need to be reminded of how Republican leaders like President Trump, Governor Bevin, and others share their values – protecting the sanctity of life, gun rights, etc.

However, in suburban and urban areas like Jefferson and Fayette County, messaging needs to focus more on quality-of-life issues, like growing the economy, reforming education, bolstering and fixing child care and adoption, etc.

That means that content like letters to the editor, op-eds, and other content submitted to urban newspapers like the Herald Leader and Courier Journal need to focus less on red-meat, conservative issues like guns and abortion, and more on kids and the economy.

Key Messages for Republican Candidates and Elected Officials:

- **Governor Matt Bevin:** Bold conservative reformer; not a career politician; fighting the failed status quo and turning Kentucky around after nearly a century of failed Democrat control
- **Agriculture Commissioner Ryan Quarles:** fighting hunger and connecting Kentucky farmers to new markets
- **Auditor Mike Harmon:** protecting taxpayer dollars, fighting for transparency and accountability in government
- **Treasurer Allison Ball:** protecting taxpayer dollars, improving financial literacy, accountability and transparency in government
- **Attorney General (TBD):**
- **Secretary of State (TBD):** Regardless of the nominee, messaging around this candidate should focus on restoring integrity, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law to the Secretary of State's office – link every Democrat to Grimes and her cronies.

Democratic Candidates and Elected Officials

Regardless of the candidate or office, messaging against the Democrats needs to be tied to the radical, unhinged resistance-movement wing of the national Democrat Party – while tying back to the failed leadership of Kentucky Democrats of the past.

- **Candidate for Governor, Rocky Adams:** career politician, misleading voters about his radical liberal record (especially guns and abortion)
- **Candidate for Governor, Andy Beshear:** career politician, born into high office, more interested in running for the next office than doing his job in protecting Kentuckians; e.g. opioids
- **Candidate for Governor, Adam Edelen:** Liberal extremist who is completely out of touch with Kentucky; career politician tied to the failed Democratic administration of the past that left our economy stagnant, our schools failing, etc.
- **Ag. Commissioner:** TBD
- **Auditor:** TBD
- **Treasurer:** TBD

- **Greg Stumbo for Attorney General:** Career politician; liberal like Clinton, Obama and Pelosi
- **Secretary of State:** *See above note on hammering Democrats as linked to Grimes*

Earned media

Through the use of press releases, op-eds, letters to the editor, and other tools, the RPK communications team will garner proactive and reactive television, print, radio, and online news coverage for candidates, elected officials, and other stakeholders, along with attacks on Democrats.

To grow our presence in the press, we have to create stronger relationships with the press. These should focus on introductions with personnel (news directors, editors, etc.) at major newspapers and television stations.

Louisville:

Courier-Journal
 Louisville Business Journal
 WAVE 3 NBC
 WLKY 32 CBS
 WDRB 41 FOX
 WHAS 11 ABC

Lexington:

Herald-Leader
 Business Lexington
 WKYT 27 CBS
 WLEX 18 NBC
 WDKY 56 FOX
 WTVQ 36 ABC

Cincinnati:

The Enquirer
 Cincinnati Business News
 WLWT 5 NBC
 WCPO 9 ABC
 WKRC 12 CBS
 WXIX 19 FOX

Paducah:

Paducah Sun
 WPSD 6 NBC

Bowling Green:

The Daily News
WBKO 13 ABC
WNKY 40 NBC/CBS

Owensboro:

Messenger-Inquirer

Hazard:

WYMT 12 CBS

Statewide:

Associated Press
Spectrum Cable News

The communications department should also plan and execute a statewide media tour for meeting with media outlets (newspapers and radio stations) in smaller communities throughout the state. Community newspapers in areas like these are often writing for an audience more receptive to conservative/Republican messages than some of their counterparts in larger markets.

These should include:

- * Ashland Daily Independent
- * Hopkinsville Kentucky New Era
- * Bardstown Kentucky Standard
- * Elizabethtown News-Enterprise
- * Richmond Register
- * Somerset Commonwealth Journal
- * Danville Advocate Messenger
- * Glasgow Daily Times
- * Harlan Enterprise
- * Middlesboro Daily News
- * Corbin Times-Tribune

Earned media content metrics:

This plan includes 6 major daily newspapers and 11 community newspapers throughout the state to target with content such as press releases, briefings, op-eds, and letters to the editor.

Ideally, each newspaper should get a submission from a surrogate, volunteer, or party official each week. This will require the communications department to aggressively build out the surrogate list – and constantly generate on-message content that is timely and relevant to local issues. Volunteers and interns could also be enlisted to assist with this content. Before

submission, all content should be reviewed and approved by RPK's communications department.

As of April 2, RPK's surrogate list contains the following:

- 34 spokespeople sorted by issue area/expertise, including commentators, legislators, and others;
- 272 RSCC members and staff; and,
- 171 volunteers who have signed up online to submit LTEs to local papers

As our media relationships strengthen, and volunteer and surrogate base grows, we will be able to generate more content to submit. Smaller community newspapers in rural areas throughout the state can also continue to be added to the targeted list.

Tracking Earned Media Exposure

The Communications Department should create and maintain an earned media tracker – a spreadsheet that contains each piece of content placed.

Example:

Date	Outlet	Author	Market	Type	Tone	Link
April 1, 2019	Daily News	John Smith	Bowling Green	Mention	Neutral	N/A
April 1, 2019	The Globe	Jane Doe	Lexington	Op-ed	Positive	N/A

Needs:

- A digital home for content; press releases, briefings, news articles, and more should have a place to live on the website for sharing via social media or email blasts to stakeholders
- An email blast system like Constant Contact, iContact or MailChimp with a large limit (likely in the tens-of-thousands of emails range) would help cast a wider net, eliminate bouncebacks, and ensure that more media and stakeholders are getting our content on a regular basis

Digital

Social Media Channels:

- Facebook: 29,795 likes
- Twitter: 13,900 followers

Media Advisory

MEDIA ADVISORY: NDGOP Election Night Watch Party

BISMARCK– The North Dakota Republican Party will be holding its official Election Night Watch Party at the Bavendick Stateroom of the National Energy Center of Excellence in Bismarck, North Dakota:

WHAT: NDGOP Election Night Watch Party

WHERE: Bavendick Stateroom of the National Energy Center of Excellence, 1200 Schafer St, Bismarck North Dakota 58501*

WHEN: Tuesday, November 6th, from 6:30pm – 11:00pm.

*Livestream of the event will be available at ndgop.org and on Facebook.

To RSVP, please email NDGOP Communications Director Jake Wilkins at jake@ndgop.org prior to election day. If you have any further questions, please contact him.

###

Rapid Response

After months of Biden and Harris claiming they were “[making progress](#)” on the crisis, the number of unaccompanied [migrant children encountered at the border per day is increasing](#). This week, the number passed the numbers seen in March and April.

New increase in migrant children at border five months into Biden tenure

It’s clear – Harris’ focus on the “root causes” in Central America have done nothing to stem the tide. Why? Because the true root cause is Biden’s open borders agenda.

As described by Guatemala President Alejandro Giammattei, Biden’s rhetoric is to blame for the border crisis: “The message changed...[the very next day the coyotes were here](#) organizing groups of children to take them to the United States.”



Biden and Harris doubled down on a failing open borders agenda that created the crisis

11. *The Wall Street Journal*: Editorial: [The U.S.-Made Border Crisis](#)
12. Reuters: [Exclusive: 'Migrant president' Biden stirs Mexican angst over boom time for gangs](#)
13. *The Washington Post*: ['No end in sight': Inside the Biden administration's failure to contain the border surge](#)
14. Reuters: ['U.S. Welcome Patrol': how some border agents are struggling with Biden's policy shift](#)
15. *The Washington Post*: [ICE deportations fell in April to lowest monthly level on record](#)
16. *The Washington Post*: [Biden administration reins in street-level enforcement by ICE as officials try to refocus agency mission](#)
17. Associated Press: [Migrants freed without court notice — sometimes no paperwork](#)
18. *The Washington Post*: [Biden administration leaves Homeland Security budget flat despite border surge](#)
19. *The Hill*: [Biden budget ends funding for border wall](#)
20. The Washington Free Beacon: [Biden's ICE Nominee Pushed to Release Violent Felons From His Jail](#)
21. The Independent: ['We are not on the same side of the coin': Guatemala president attacks Kamala Harris day before landmark meeting](#)