

BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND ISSUE PROMOTION

Advocates need to employ effective communication strategies to successfully engage candidates on the issues—strong talking points alone are not enough. It’s not only about what you say but *how* you say it, *when* you say it, *where* you say it, and *who* is saying it *to whom*. When speaking to candidates about child care, infant and maternal health, early head start, paid family and medical leave, and family economic security, here are some things to consider.

1. **Know your audience.** Understand your target audience’s concerns, values, and priorities based on their political track record, personal experiences, and party alignment. Accordingly, consider what might persuade them to agree with your cause. If the candidate is open about their role as a parent, they may be open to a conversation parent-to-parent about concerns with the status quo. If the candidate’s top priority is improving the economy, emphasize the long-term economic and workforce development benefits of investing in programs today.
2. **Humanize the issue.** Use personal narratives and real-life examples to illustrate why these policies matter. Share stories of families who have benefited from access to affordable child care or paid leave, highlighting the challenges they faced and the positive outcomes they experienced. Humanize the issue to evoke empathy and drive action.
3. **Make it urgent.** On the campaign trail, it’s easy to see everything as a “day one priority.” For something to become one, candidates need to recognize why your solution will have long-term and far-reaching positive impacts while garnering support among their constituency base. This means clearly making the case about the urgency of the problem, why your solution will address this need, and ultimately how their support would help achieve policy changes that will improve people’s lives.
4. **Use data and evidence.** Support your arguments with credible data, research, and statistics to demonstrate the gravity of the problem at hand and the efficacy of the solutions you’re pushing for. Whenever possible, highlight the potential long-term impact of an investment today (i.e., the return on investment for doing the right thing).
5. **Choose the best messenger.** After carefully considering your audience, consider who would be the most effective messenger for each message you need to deliver. For example, a recent [Gallup poll](#) indicates that nurses are the most trusted professionals in the U.S., followed by physicians and grade-school teachers. However, some messages might only be heard if a parent or local business person delivers them.

6. **Choose the best medium.** Consider where and how you're delivering your message. There are public-facing mediums, such as public forums, social media, and media outlets, which put a public spotlight on the policy conversation but may be less likely to result in an open, honest conversation. Behind-the-scenes conversations may allow you to get into the weeds on the issues but lack the accountability that the public spotlight can bring to your policy priorities.
7. **Be prepared for a two-way conversation.** It's crucial to be prepared for tough questions and push-back from the person you're speaking to, even if you presume the candidate is aligned with you on the issues. Ahead of time, list out questions that you would find challenging to answer and address them one by one, backing them up with data and stories. While you should be prepared, you don't need to know everything! If you can't sufficiently answer a candidate's question in real-time, let them know you'd like to follow up over email to answer their question in greater detail. When offering this, it's important to follow up promptly to avoid leaving them hanging.



NCIT is here to support your advocacy campaign in a variety of ways to help you plan and execute your campaign. We support advocacy campaigns by mobilizing communities, advancing science and research through communications and messaging expertise, and other forms of capacity building for organizations. We offer tools and resources, connections to partner organizations, one-on-one coaching, and training to organizations advocating for policies that impact expectant parents, infants, toddlers, and their families. Each request starts a conversation – you don't have to have all the details ready. We'll get you connected to the right person! [Connect with us here!](#)