



Little Black Book: **Media and Message**

by People For the American Way Foundation Communications Staff
with a case study by Nicole Karlebach, *Brandeis University*/former YP4 staff

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This manual is an installment in the **YP4 Black Book** series.

Please see the other issues for valuable information
on similar topics, including:

Starting a Student Organization

Media & Message

E-Organizing



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Introduction

A strong message and a good media plan are essential to the success of any campaign. In order to succeed, you must reach your target audiences with a compelling and convincing message that supports your campaign, brings in partners and allies, and helps you achieve your goals.

Here are some basic questions to get you started:

1. What are the goals of our campaign?

2. Who are we trying to reach?

- **What are our target audiences?**

3. What messages and ideas resonate with those audiences?

- **Why should they care about the campaign?**

4. Which media outlets reach those audiences?

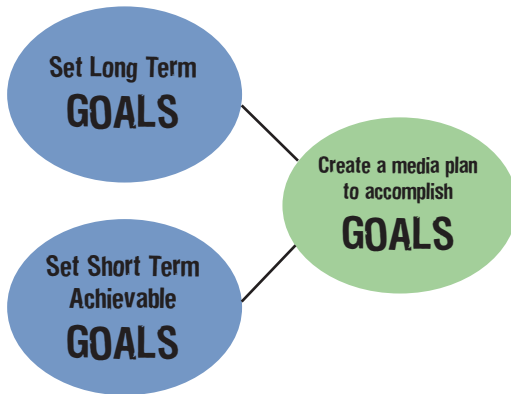
5. Who are the people and institutions who have credibility with those audiences?

6. How will we measure our success?

**Remember: This is a Little Black Book.
Keep it in a safe place.**

Chapter One: Setting Goals

Your goals should drive your message and your media plan – not the other way around. Whether the scope of your campaign is local, state or national, setting clear goals is essential. Be specific and lay out achievable goals with clear measures for success.



GOALS

**Your goals should drive your message and your media plan
– not the other way around.**

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Chapter Two: Defining Targets

With clear goals in mind, you can determine your target audiences, and the media outlets and communications tools that will reach them. Target audiences fall into three general categories:

- Groups and individuals who can take action to achieve your goal- Sometimes they are legislators, school board members, or local activists
- Groups and individuals who already agree with your goal and will help you
- Groups and individuals who can be persuaded to support your goal- A story in the local newspaper or on a popular radio or TV news show can raise your visibility enormously, but do your research and don't limit your thinking.



The People You Must Convince In Order To Achieve Your Goal

Where do they get their information?

What media outlets do they pay attention to?

What newspapers, columnists and reporters do they respect?

What blogs do they read; what web sites do they visit; where will they see ads, posters or flyers?

People Who Already Agree With You

How do you get them to take action on your behalf?

How do you broaden your appeal?

Where do like-minded people get their information?



People Who Would Agree If They Knew About Your Campaign

Research: Polling data can help you identify "persuadables".

Think: Which groups in your area share your interests?

Example: If you are working on an education issue think about students, teachers, administrators, parents and the service clubs they belong to.

Media Sources: Mainstream newspapers, radio, Television, alternative weekly newspapers, blogs, newsletters, e-mail networks

Will you invite the news media to campaign events such as volunteer trainings, phone banks, etc.?

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Chapter Three: Crafting Your Message

A clear and compelling message is the heart of a successful campaign. Ideally, a message should encapsulate the problem and your solution in a phrase that is easy to understand, and easy to present visually. The top-level message can't convey all the information of your campaign, but it should capture the essence. The worlds of politics, advocacy and advertising are full of great examples:



Remember, you're already convinced. You're trying to reach your target audience. Put yourself in their shoes. Think about the messages that will resonate with your target audience and build support.

**Why should your target audience care about this issue?
What words and phrases do they find persuasive?**

Think about possible opposition or resistance to your campaign. If there are people and groups you know will oppose your campaign, think about their arguments.

**Do they have an existing message?
Does your message effectively counter theirs?
Do you have a response to their best arguments?**

Be ready for opposition arguments, but don't start on the defensive or anticipate a counter-argument before it is made. Criticizing the opposition is fine – but make sure you have an attractive alternative.

Chapter Three: Crafting Your Message

DO

- Reach out to your target audience
- Think about the potential opposition
- Change your message only if it's not working, or worse, having a negative effect

DON'T

- Assume your audience knows where you are coming from
- Pre-empt your opposition with a defensive message
- Change your message frequently

Are there locally or nationally known experts or celebrities who can headline a campaign event for you?

Will you write letters to the editor and opinion articles to submit to newspapers?

Can you meet with editorial boards at newspapers to make your case and try for a positive editorial?



THE MESSAGE

A clear and compelling message is the heart of a successful campaign.

NOTES

Chapter Four: Organizing a Media Plan

A media plan will help you focus your efforts and follow through. Elements of a media plan include:

- A statement of your goals
- A statement of your message
- Identification of your target audiences and target media
- A list of the documents and campaign items you need to produce, such as press kits, T-shirts, brochures, reports, fact sheets, flyers, ads, etc.
- A calendar with a schedule of time lines, deadlines and milestones
- Plans for creative campaign events, including launches, rallies, news conferences, visual events, photo ops and message events.
- A list of media contacts, including the beat reporters and publications that cover your issue

Will there be a launch event announcing your campaign?

The plan should include specific assignments and deadlines. Set a date for achieving your ultimate goal and work backwards to determine the steps along the way – what you need to accomplish and when. Include milestones that may affect your campaign: a primary election, a legislative recess, the anniversary of a key historic event, etc.



A MEDIA PLAN

**Set a date for achieving your ultimate goal,
and work backwards to determine the steps along the way.**

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Chapter Five: Tools for Reaching the Media

There are standard formats for reaching the news media, described below. Don't be afraid to be creative and try non-traditional means for reaching the media. A well-designed media event can bring attention to your campaign and tell your story, but beware of stunts that can backfire.

News Release – News releases are an easy way to disseminate information and the most common form of media outreach. For tips on how and when to write a press release, see the appendix “Press Releases Do's and Don'ts” at the end of this course book.

Media Advisories – Media advisories inform reporters, news directors, editors, etc., of upcoming events. They should include a brief description of the event, the date, time, place and participants, and contact information for someone who can answer questions about the event. Advisories should be sent at least a week in advance or earlier for a major event such as a concert or rally. The advisory lets reporters and editors know the event is coming so they will cover it; ensures the event is listed in the daybooks that the wire services (e.g., Associated Press, Reuters) prepare for journalists; places public events in local community calendars and schedules; and may inspire pre-stories describing the event and the campaign.



Photos / Photo Ops – Reach out to photo editors at local papers and television stations when you've got a good visual. Even if you don't get a full story, newspapers may run a picture and a caption. Take your own high-resolution photos, and post them on your website. News agencies may ask to use them. Have photos of your campaign leaders ready for news outlets who request them.

Press Packets – Create folders that include a summary of your campaign, information about the campaign principals and their biographies, and other information such as brochures, fact sheets, studies, reports, clips of news coverage, lists of partner organizations, and quotes from supporters and allies. Give each member of the media covering your campaign a folder.

Are there reporters at local newspapers, television and radio stations who are assigned to cover your college or the topic your campaign is addressing? (For example, many newspapers have education reporters and most have business reporters. In cities with large universities, reporters are often assigned to cover the institution, itself.)

Events – Creative, funny or dramatic events are an excellent way to attract media coverage. Create your own events, and scour campus and community calendars for events or activities that you can play off of to create a campaign event (for example, the “unemployment line” that stretched through Manhattan as a counter-event to the GOP political convention). Make sure the event has strong visuals and conveys your message.

Chapter Five: Tools for Reaching the Media

News Conferences – News conferences and briefings should be called only when there is significant news. When possible, hold news conferences between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. in a location convenient for reporters. It helps to hold a news conference in a place that supports your message visually – a park, a hospital, a factory — but it should not be hard to reach or too far from the reporter’s home base. Always make sure you have permission before holding an event in a public or private space; the story should be about the event, itself, or the fact that you were denied permission to use the space you wanted, not your failure to obtain needed permits.

Are there local talk radio shows that will cover your campaign?

News Briefings - Briefings are informal events designed to give reporters detailed background information about your issue. Have your experts and spokespeople available to make presentations, and have all the information available in written form for the reporters to take with them.

Editorial Boards – Special briefings for the editorial boards of local newspapers can introduce your campaign and your campaign leaders, and give you the opportunity to demonstrate why the newspaper should write an editorial supporting your issue. Research past editorials in the newspaper related to your issue and send your press packet to the appropriate editor before your meeting.

Op-Eds – Op-Eds are guest opinion articles in newspapers and other publications. They allow you to make your case on your terms and in your words. Submit the article to the appropriate editor (rules are usually listed on the publication’s web site) and follow up with a phone call. Be prepared to make the case as to why your article is newsworthy. It should be substantive, thorough, thoughtful and accurate. Offer your Op-Ed exclusively to one paper at a time. If your first choice rejects it, then go to your next priority.



Letters to the Editor – Your campaign team and supporters should be encouraged to send letters to the editor to bring attention to your issue and demonstrate support. Each letter should be individual. Form letters or mass mailings will not be printed. Provide key policy and message points to your supporters, and urge them to write letters in their own words. For tips, see the appendix item “Writing a Letter to the Editor.”

Newsletters and E-mail – Consider sending out regular, brief e-mails or newsletters updating reporters and others on the progress of your campaign. These are designed not to engender immediate news coverage, but to keep journalists apprised of your progress and engaged with your issue. If your campaign leadership is addressing a campus group, you may want to send out an e-mail, or you might send interested reporters copies of news coverage or commentary that relates to your issue, whether your organization is mentioned or not.

Chapter Six: Contacting the Media

PRESS KIT:

A folder you pass out to members of the media that contains material describing your campaign and your goals.

Build a complete list of media contacts in your region. Include wire services, newspapers, television, radio stations, magazines, web publications, trade publications and newsletters, as well as individual reporters. List phone numbers, fax numbers, a general e-mail address for the newsroom, and e-mails and direct phone numbers for specific reporters.

Newswires: Wire services, such as the Associated Press, are largely invisible to news consumers, but play a key role. Include all local newswires in your contacts – AP, Reuters, Knight-Ridder, Gannett, Scripps-Howard, Dow Jones, Bloomberg, UPI, etc. Some states

have news services organized to serve specific outlets, such as the Capital News TV service in Tallahassee, Florida, which prepares TV news reports for markets throughout the state.

Newspapers: Contact assignment editors with advisories and announcements. Establish relationships with reporters and columnists who cover your issues, and with the editorial or opinion editors in charge of op-Eds, letters to the editor and editorial board meetings. Don't neglect weeklies, alternative papers and minority papers.

Television: Contact news directors, assignment editors and weekend assignment editors with events and announcements.

Radio: Contact assignment editors and bureau reporters for all-news radio stations; news directors for music-and-news format stations; and producers/bookers for talk radio shows. Pay particular attention to those contacts from stations that target the audiences you want to reach.

Will you have visual or message events to raise awareness of your campaign, such as symbols or mascots (for example, the "Billionaires for Bush" characters at campaign rallies)?

Magazines: News stories should go to the editors in charge of specific departments. Look for features editors, political editors, minority outreach editors, columnists, etc. Be sure to allow for long lead times on magazines which appear only weekly, monthly or quarterly.

See Appendix C for helpful tips on communicating with the news media.



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Chapter Seven: The Campus Media

The media on your campus (college radio, student newspapers and publications, and television if you have it) should be prime targets for your campaign.

Build relationships with campus media outlets. Relationship building should start as soon as (or before) your campaign begins. You might want to begin with a campus newspaper, for example, by inviting the news editor to join you and other leaders of your campaign for coffee or lunch and then explain what your campaign is about and what you hope to accomplish.

Campus Newspapers: Talk with the newspaper's opinion editor and ask if she or he will consider accepting an Op-Ed submission from people within your campaign. Write letters to the editor. And see if you can meet the editorial board and persuade them to write an editorial supporting your efforts.

Campus Radio Station: Ask the show's producers if they'd have you on to talk about your campaign. Also make use of friends' shows on the station. Better yet, see if you and others involved in your campaign can get your own radio show.

Finally, use the coverage you generate on campus to create coverage elsewhere. Forward stories that appear in the campus newspaper to other media outlets in your area. One of the best ways to convince outside reporters that something students are doing is newsworthy is to show them that this activity is being covered in campus publications.

Reinforce Your Message on Campus

Once you've determined what your message is, and once you've started working to generate coverage of your message in the media, you ought to consider employing some of the following message reinforcement techniques. Be sure you employ a consistent message throughout, regardless of the medium.

Ads: Often too expensive, but may be a good idea if you can afford them.

Posters: Learn what the rules are for putting up posters on your campus and in your community. The most affordable option is to copy a design on 8.5x11 paper, but larger posters attract more attention while allowing for more space to project your message.

Chapter Seven: The Campus Media

Leafleting: You might want to consider producing a flyer that communicates your message and provides information about your issue and how to get involved. You can distribute this flyer through dorms, as well as to houses and apartments in your community.

Tabling: Many campuses allow student groups to set up tables in highly trafficked areas. If you do this, make sure to have posters or visuals that clearly communicate your message to those walking by, as well as more detailed materials for people who stop and ask about your campaign.

Dining Hall Info Cards: Some campuses allow student groups to place informational cards on tables in their dining halls.

Chalking: Sidewalk chalk can be a fun and creative way to reinforce your campaign message. If a group of people are chalking, make sure they know what the key points that you want them to convey are so that they can remain on message.

Are there events already scheduled where your campaign can have a presence (e.g., board meetings, job fairs, candidate debates or other places where people with an interest in your campaign will gather)?



CAMPUS MEDIA

Build relationships with campus media outlets. Relationship building should start as soon as (or before) your campaign begins.

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Chapter Eight: Tracking Coverage

Keep good records of media coverage, including copies of print and web coverage, and recordings of radio and TV stories. Good records will allow you to assess which strategies were most effective, and remind you of the ways key reporters, columnists and editorial writers view your issue. Good records also will give you good materials to show to funders, allies and new reporters.

Will there be a launch event announcing your campaign?

“Do you have a budget for paid advertising in newspapers, or on radio or television stations?”

The easiest and cheapest way to monitor coverage of your campaign is to track it online through daily searches – something you should be doing anyway to keep yourself informed.



COVERAGE TRACKING

Keep good records of media coverage, including copies of print and web coverage, and recordings of radio and television stories.

Case Study: Brandeis University

Using the Campus Media to Your Advantage – Failure and Success

by Nicole Karlebach, former YP4 Program Associate

In early 2004, after having been respected for years as an active, effective student organization, the popularity of the Brandeis University Student Union Government (SUG) was on the decline. Student interest in its initiatives was decreasing and the sentiment on campus was one of general apathy toward its operations. In an effort to reverse this process, members of the government made the decision to hire a Director of Public Affairs and Communications. This new position had three main objectives:

1. To restore a positive reputation to the SUG on campus
2. To utilize the campus media to the advantage of the SUG by framing its actions in a positive light
3. To ensure media coverage of its work and projects, which benefit students

The new Director laid the groundwork for communication between the government and the campus media – including the newspaper, and radio and television stations. First, the Director provided her personal contact information to each of these organizations so that she could be contacted when any story began to develop involving the SUG. Next, she collected the contact information for the SUG members so that she could easily refer media to specific people when necessary. Lastly, she set up meetings with representatives of each campus media organization to establish relationships and lines of communication. This later evolved into weekly radio spots and “press gaggles,” which were weekly meetings of the Director and SUG President with the editors of the campus paper, *The Justice*.

The Director was first put to the test when the SUG passed a resolution supporting the use of clean, renewable energy in all new construction on the Brandeis campus. The intention of the resolution was to inform students about the energy initiative and galvanize support for it. To ensure that this goal was met, the Director sent a press release to the campus newspaper and used her weekly radio spot to broadcast the passage of the resolution.

The release framed the issue in terms of the SUG’s role and included quotes from the group that had presented the clean energy proposal. *The Justice* responded well to this strategy and printed an article, “Student Union Senate approves environmental improvements, changes.” The framing was successful since the article focused on how the SUG had taken the lead on the issue. This gave the SUG more leverage in its negotiations with the administration – the only body with the power to commit the University to the energy policy – and increased awareness among students.

Appendix No. 1: Do's and Don'ts of Press Release Writing

DO

- Make your headline and first paragraph tell the story in a compelling fashion. Your lead grabs readers' attention and tells them why the release is important. The best leads are only one or two lines long. Leave details, explanations and quotes for the body of the release.
- Anticipate reporters' questions and answer them. The proverbial "who, what, where, when and why" should be included. Provide the necessary background and contact information regarding you, your issue, your organization or your service.
- Develop a news hook. You may be excited about your story, but reporters may not feel it is relevant or exciting enough to write about. Put yourself in the reporter's shoes and focus the press release on what makes your news item important for the audience that the reporter serves – readers, listeners, viewers.
- Use real-life examples and stories to illustrate your point. Demonstrate the effect that the issue you are addressing has on real people. Give details about how your issue will directly affect the audience you are targeting.
- Tell the truth. The news media expects you to convey your ideas honestly; they will never forget if you misrepresent the facts. Once credibility is lost, it is almost impossible to regain.
- Be timely. Respond to breaking news as quickly as possible and relate your story to current issues in the news. Don't issue press releases late in the day or on Fridays or weekends, if you can avoid it.
- Use active verbs and strong adjectives.
- Be brief. Journalists are busy and get inundated with news releases. Send them short, provocative materials – they'll ask for more details when you've got them interested.
- Get permission before using quotes or information from other organizations or affiliates. This is most important for press releases that are coming from a coalition of organizations.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread. Check your grammar, your spelling, the date and all contact information. If your release has grammatical errors, you won't be taken seriously.
- Include a phone number that will be answered by a live person, and make sure any e-mail addresses and websites you include are working.

Appendix No. 2: Writing a Letter to the Editor

1. Keep your letter brief. You are most likely to get printed if your letter is 200 words or less.
2. Type your letter.
3. Make one point or two, at the most, in your letter. State your point clearly, ideally in the first or second sentence.
4. Your letter must be timely. Address a recent article, editorial or letter that appeared in the paper to which you are writing. If you are not addressing a recent article, then tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
5. Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper to which you are writing. It is acceptable to refute or support specific statements or address relevant facts that may have been ignored by an article or editorial, but do not attack the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
6. Check the letter specifications of the newspaper to which you are writing. Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. This information is usually available online, or on the editorial page of the newspaper. You usually must include your name, signature, address and phone number.
7. Support your statements with facts. You may consider sending documentation along with your letter or citing the information you are quoting in the letter. But do not overload the editors with too much information. Use the talking points in this tool kit for specific information on the issues.
8. Find others to write letters, when possible. If the newspaper receives a variety of letters on one issue, it will express to the paper, and to the public, that other individuals in the community are concerned about the issue. Sending a variety of letters will increase the chances of one getting published. But, be sure not to send form letters. It's important to be original – multiple form letters to the same paper will only annoy the newspaper to which you are writing.
9. Monitor the paper to see if your letter runs. If your letter has not appeared within a week or two, follow up with a call to the editorial department of the newspaper.

Appendix No. 3: Communicating with the News Media

Reporters are busy and deluged with information. It's important to help them understand your campaign in the most direct, helpful, efficient way possible. Here are some tips:

- **Do the research and present it clearly.** Provide the reporters with accurate, well-researched information that conveys your message. Don't make a reporter wade through news stories, reports, studies and other information stories. Do that yourself, and present statistics and information in concise nuggets of information. For example, don't make the reporter find out how many people are living under the poverty level in your state – find that information for him and provide the source.
- **Get to the point.** Be ready to make your case to reporters and editors quickly over the phone. Tell them why you're calling and give them the key information up front. If it is not an urgent call, ask if this is a good time to talk and offer to call back if it is not.
- **Stay on message.** Before you go into an interview, make sure you know the points you want to make and make them clearly. Try not to be drawn into tangential topics or long, wandering answers. Answer questions directly and positively, and always bring your answer to the point you want to make. Signal your intent to the reporter with words like, "If I leave you with only one thought today, I want it to be this:" and stay on message. If you need some time to think about the question, find out what deadline the reporter is working on and offer to call back.
- **Don't guess and never lie.** If you do not know the answer to a question a reporter asks, never speculate, guess or invent an answer. It's okay to say, "I don't know." Tell the reporter you will call back when you have accurate information.
- **Give yourself time.** You don't have to answer immediately. Ask a reporter when his or her deadline is, and arrange a time to call back when you've had a chance to think about what you want to say.
- **On the record.** Assume that any time you are speaking to a reporter you are speaking for the campaign and not for yourself. Never say anything you would not want to see in a news story. The rules for speaking off the record or on background can be murky. Avoid speaking off the record.
- **Timing is everything.** Respect reporters' time limitations and deadlines. Call them back in a timely fashion. If you have an interview scheduled, show up on time and be prepared. If you do not feel you are the right person to speak on an issue, tell the reporter and suggest alternatives.

Appendix No. 3: Communicating with the News Media

• **Practice makes perfect.** Before an interview, editorial board meeting or media event, make sure your principals are prepared. Be ready with a succinct opening presentation that sets out your message. Compile a list of likely questions and practice responding. If you anticipate hostile questions, organize a “murder board” with friends throwing tough questions at you. Practice will help you organize your thoughts and give you greater confidence.

NOTES

Appendix No. 4: Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 28, 2005

CONTACT: Priscilla Ring or Josh Glasstetter

at 202-467-4999

LEGISLATURE SENDS ANOTHER HARSH MESSAGE TO GAY MEN AND LESBIANS: "YOU ARE NOT WELCOME HERE"

Legislature gives preliminary OK to discriminatory anti-gay constitutional amendment

The Virginia legislature gave preliminary approval on Saturday, February 26, to a proposed state constitutional amendment that would not only restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples, but would also prohibit legal protections for same-sex couples and their families through civil unions or similar relationships.

"Virginia says it's for lovers, but that slogan should be retired as false advertising," said People For the American Way President Ralph G. Neas. "In a state whose legal code is already filled with laws discriminating against gay people, this proposed amendment would cement into the state constitution second-class citizenship for gay and lesbian Virginians."

Neas noted that this is not the first time the Virginia legislature has voted to mandate inequality. Years ago the state enacted a law prohibiting recognition of the marriages of same-sex couples and declaring such marriages void. Last year's "Marriage Affirmation Act" prohibits partnership contracts for same-sex couples.

In order to be adopted, the proposed constitutional amendment must be passed by another session of the state legislature and then approved by a public referendum. (The approval of the governor is not required.) If the amendment passes during next year's legislative session, it could be on the statewide ballot as early as November 2006.

"A bipartisan majority of Americans support some form of legal protection for gay and lesbian Americans and their families," said Neas. "We hope Virginia legislators will reject this amendment the next time it comes before them, and will reconsider their assault on the basic American ideal of equality under the law for all people."

The proposed amendment passed the state Senate 30-10, and the House 80-17:

That only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this Commonwealth and its political subdivisions.

This Commonwealth and its political subdivisions shall not create or recognize a legal status for relationships of unmarried individuals that intends to approximate the design, qualities, significance, or effects of marriage. Nor shall this Commonwealth or its political subdivisions create or recognize another union, partnership, or other legal status to which is assigned the rights, benefits, obligations, qualities, or effects of marriage.

Appendix No. 5: Sample Media Advisory

For Immediate Release
November 17, 2004

Contact: Laurie Boeder
202-467-4999

PEOPLE FOR THE AMERICAN WAY FOUNDATION TO PARTICIPATE IN OHIO VOTER HEARING

People For the American Way Foundation (PFAWF) will be among the groups gathering testimony on irregularities and inequities in the conduct of the November election at a hearing scheduled this Friday in Cleveland, Ohio.

PFAWF is a founding member of Election Protection (EP), which deployed more than 25,000 volunteer poll watchers, lawyers and law students across the nation during the November election, along with a nationwide EP voter hotline which received more than 125,000 calls from voters. Nearly 2,000 EP volunteers were deployed across Ohio in Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Akron, Toledo, and Youngstown.

PFAWF is analyzing the problems reported across the country, and is hoping to gather more evidence at the Ohio hearing to buttress a range of initiatives aimed at correcting those problems, including lawsuits and an agenda for election reform.

Ohio voters who experienced problems on Election Day and have not already notified EP are encouraged to attend the Cleveland hearing. Two similar hearings held last week in Columbus drew hundreds of citizens who testified on their personal experiences with voter suppression and election irregularities.

The coalition of organizations participating in the hearing includes the Ohio Conference NAACP, Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor, Voices of the Electorate, Black Women's Political Action Committee, Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition, NAACP National Voter Fund, Neighborhood Centers Association, Ohio Voterization Project, Ohio Voter Protection Coalition, CASE Ohio, and African American Women's Agenda Education Foundation.

What: Ohio Voter Hearing

Who: Vicky Beasley, PFAWF's legal director for EP
Helen Forbes Fields, civil rights attorney and EP volunteer
Greg Moore, Executive Director of the NAACP National Voter Fund
Melvin S. Schwarzwald, co-chair of the Ohio Voter Protection Coalition legal operation
Jasmine Torres Lugo, former judge, Cleveland Municipal Court

When: Friday, November 19th from 6:00-9:00 PM

Where: AFL-CIO Laborers Hall (lower level)
3250 Euclid Ave.
Cleveland, OH

Jim Crow is Alive and Well

By Ralph G. Neas

Posted on August 16, 2004

<http://www.alternet.org/story/19545/>

Editor's Note: Ralph G. Neas is president of People For the American Way, which fights to uphold 50 years of legal and social justice progress.

While it would be comforting to think that the last vestiges of voter intimidation and suppression were swept away by the passage and enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, frequent and disturbing incidents in the past few years prove otherwise.

The bloody days of violence and retribution following the Civil War and Reconstruction are gone. The poll taxes, literacy tests and physical violence of the Jim Crow era have disappeared. Today, more subtle, cynical and creative tactics have taken their places.

Voter intimidation and suppression are not problems limited to the South. They are not the province of a single political party, although patterns of intimidation have changed as the party allegiances of minorities, particularly African-Americans, have shifted over the years. They have served to create doubt about the equality of our democracy and cynicism at home and abroad.

Events in recent years show that some hope to undermine the achievements of the Voting Rights Act. In 2000 in Florida, thousands of voters whose names mistakenly appeared on a flawed list of felons were purged from the state's voter rolls. Despite the ensuing outcry and litigation, the state has not yet restored the rights of many of those voters. In fact, officials prepared to purge an additional 40,000 names for the 2004 election until the new list was made public by court order and its flaws exposed.

In 2002 in Baltimore, anonymous fliers were posted in some African-American neighborhoods with the heading "URGENT NOTICE." The flier listed the wrong date for Election Day and warned that parking tickets and overdue rent should be paid before voting. In Louisiana, flyers were distributed in African-American communities telling voters they could go to the polls on Tuesday, Dec. 10th – three days after a runoff Senate election was held.

Another instance of this disturbing trend occurred in 2003 when voters in African-American neighborhoods in Philadelphia were systematically challenged by men carrying clipboards, driving a fleet of some 300 sedans with magnetic signs designed to look like law enforcement insignia. Also in 2003, in Louisville, Kentucky, Jefferson County Republicans placed challengers at as many as 59 voting

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