Community Engagement 101

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MOWER
Congratulations!
You’re launching a Community Engagement Campaign!
Most of the time, Community Engagement campaigns go well...
But sometimes they don’t...
What is a Community Engagement Campaign?

“The activity or activities designed to create good will, understanding and acceptance of a concept or proposal.”

S. Casey

“No one believes him because he’s old and forgets things.”

B. Kennedy
Do you really need one?

Do you really want one?
So you’re going forward.

1. What are your goals?
2. What is “Success”?
3. What is “Failure”?
4. How bad can it get?

Targeting everyone is not an option.
Play to your strengths.

You are the government.
Do some simple research.

You are not the first municipality to:
(insert your project here).

Somebody else has already endured that pain, made the mistakes, taken the hits.
Choose up sides.

Identify natural allies, natural enemies, and everyone in between.

Identify stakeholders.

Keep an eye on the opposition. (especially their social media activity)
Watch out for anti-tax activists.

Look to your left.

Look to your right.

100% of the people you see don’t like taxes.
What can go wrong?

• You lose control of the discussion.
• You don’t know your own facts.
• You get outmaneuvered or outworked.
• You break the law and go to jail.
A word about rules.

• New York State has some very specific rules about what you are and are **not** allowed to get a referendum.
• As the sponsor of a project, you are only allowed to provide educational materials about it.
• The opposition has no such restraints on their tactics.
How are you going to reach your audience?

Old School:
- Open Houses
- Town Hall Meetings
- Door to Door
- Lawn Signs
- Postcards/Flyers
- The Media
How else are you going to reach your audience?

New School:

- Social Media
- Influencers/bloggers
- Online surveys
- Video
- Email
- Your website
A word about websites.

Make sure you pay your webmaster.

https://www.fabiusny.com
Hi.

Somehow, without any discussion I found my position as Webmaster terminated after 10+ years. Instead the Town Supervisor has decided that a 'pay for service' was better.

If you know of someone looking for a web programmer using PHP, MySQL, JScript, and HTML send an email to eric (AT sign goes here) thisnthat.org. Thanks.
A word about surveys.

• Surveys can be a part of a community engagement campaign.
• Before you conduct a survey, think about what you will do with the results.
• If you listen and act on results, it sets a precedent.
• If you don’t listen, it calls into question why you took it in the first place.
Is there a natural ambassador for your cause?

Dexter needs a new playground.

Because the only place he ever goes is the library.

Local celebrities also an option.
You need messaging.

“This is so important – we gave it its own slide and didn’t put a picture.”

S. Casey

“He couldn’t think of a picture, which is why there isn’t one on this slide.”

B. Kennedy
Three messages about messaging:

It’s what we always say. It’s always safe to say, and you always say it no matter what.

Using messaging is not natural. Not preparing it, saying it, or fielding questions with it. But:

You can use it to manage any challenging conversation – if you master the techniques.
Preparing messaging:

To be safe to use, and to serve you and your cause properly, messaging must be written, honed, vetted, learned, and practiced. That means:
Write it – then rewrite and/or edit it to make it briefer, tighter, snappier.
Show it to colleagues, staff, bosses, and spouses for suggestions, review, and approval.
Learn it so well that you can recite it without sounding like you’re reciting.
Preparing messaging (cont.):

Most information in messaging is in your reservoir of smarts, experience, and wisdom. But for most challenging presentations or conversations, your reservoir is necessary but not sufficient.

Messaging follows a 3x3 form: Three (exactly) messages (assertions, lofty claims, or even statements of values), each with three (or more) proof points (facts, statistics, anecdotes).
Engagement doesn’t end after the public has spoken.

Engagement lasts forever.

Win or lose, you need to continue the process of engagement.
A word about demographics.

• Research previous community controversies.
• Watch the news.
• Read the letters to the editor and comments on online news stories (a gold mine and a great place to learn about your vocal neighbors).
• Mine the data. See how people voted in the past.
The most important demographic in any small town is...
Three takeaway points:

1. Do your homework.
2. Public engagement never stops.
3. Think before you act.
Questions

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