



POLITICAL & LEGISLATIVE
MOBILIZATION

AFT Resource Guide



INCLUDED:

BUILDING BLOCKS

PAGE 2

Data and Targeting
Website Development / Website Promotion
Online Surveys / Worksite Surveys

LOW-INTENSITY ACTIVITIES

PAGE 2

Email
Newsletters
Fliers / Worksite Bulletin Boards
Robocalls
Visibility

MEDIUM-INTENSITY ACTIVITIES

PAGE 3

Click to Call
Live Member-to-Member Calls (Phone Banks)
IVR Polling
Patch-Through Calls
Direct Mail
Interviews
Twitter
Facebook
Text Messaging
Letters to the Editor / Op-Eds
Advocacy
One-on-One Member Education / Worksite Mobilization

HIGH-INTENSITY ACTIVITIES

PAGE 6

Telephone Town Halls
Webinars & Conference Calls
Speaking Engagements
Blogs
Labor Walks
Events

ADVERTISING / MARKETING

PAGE 7

Earned Media
Paid Media
Print Ads
Online Ads
Radio Ads
Television Ads
YouTube

SUPPLEMENTS

PAGE 8

Sponsorships
Tchotchkes

BUILDING BLOCKS



Data and Targeting

The first step to targeting your most active members is ensuring your data records are updated and accurate. First, middle and last name; suffix (if used); phone numbers; address; email address; and date of birth are all important. Including date of birth, middle name and suffix in particular will improve our ability to match our membership records to the voter file. Good data and regular updating your file will make everything else in your plan work effectively and more easily. The best-planned event or most eye-catching and informative newsletters are wasted on bad data.

The AFT provides voter file access to affiliates via the Labor Action Network (LAN), our customized Voter Activation Network (VAN) platform. This web-based platform contains local-level member and householder data, as well as general public records for the voting-age population, including unregistered voters. Available items include vote history, party registration, age and other demographic information, past candidate and issue support, modeled scores, and phone numbers and addresses from multiple sources. The LAN also allows users to create printed or virtual phone banks, turf packets and canvass reports. Contact Melissa Carson at mcarson@aft.org for more information and to create an account.

Website Development / Website Promotion

Cost-effective and fast, the Internet helps make campaign materials such as news releases, issue papers, articles, literature and issue updates immediately available. Pack as much information on your site as you can, but make sure you keep your content logically organized as well as varied, and keep the writing lively.

Through your state affiliate, you can set up your own union website, with easy-to-use, Internet-based tools, by signing up with AFT StateWeb. The AFT StateWeb program includes hosting, design templates and an Internet-based content-management system that allows you to update your site easily and provides content syndication from the national union and your state affiliate, for free.

Create a special icon for legislative campaign information, so people recognize it immediately. Publish your web address on everything you produce to drive visitors to the site. Your website must be constantly updated: The richer and fresher the content, the more likely your website will become a go-to resource for your members and other stakeholders. Further, your site should ask visitors for their email addresses, so that you have a way to contact them in the future. By asking for email addresses and permission to contact them, you will build your base of informed members and activists. Offer your visitors something in return for their email addresses—e.g., special insider reports, a bumper sticker, etc.—so they will be motivated to give them to you.

Online Surveys / Worksite Surveys

Engaging members begins with listening. Members will feel like they have a stake in the campaign and the actions being taken, if they know their concerns are being heard and addressed. Surveys can build a sense of ownership of the issue and are a first step in building activists.

LOW-INTENSITY ACTIVITIES

Email



Phone calls and mailings take time and money. By using an email list to stay in touch with your members, you can quickly respond to attacks, mobilize them for an event, remind them to go to the polls, and keep your legislative campaign in their minds—all for a fraction of the cost of direct mail or phone banks. Action Network is a free email advocacy system that allows you to communicate with members, track data about the messages you send, garner support and more. Through Action Network, you can run online campaigns targeting elected officials or the media, set up events and even fundraise. If you are not currently an Action Network user and want to get started, visit www.aft.to/ActionNetwork to request a partnered account, or contact actionnetwork@aft.org for more information.

Newsletters

Use your newsletters to keep people informed about what you are doing, what is going on in your state legislature, and how it will affect them personally. Newsletters can be a great way of communicating and mobilizing because you have complete control of the message and your readers are people who want the information you have. As with websites, there is nothing wrong with saying the same thing many different ways in your newsletter, or providing updates on the same important topic in every issue of your newsletter. There is no reason to limit communication on an important issue to one story.

Fliers / Worksite Bulletin Boards

Clean, tightly worded and visually compelling fliers (the mainstay of worksite organizing) remain a great way to keep members and the community informed and engaged. Anyone can easily share fliers or post information on worksite bulletin boards. Fliers serve as a conversation starter and can be passed from worker to worker. Make sure your fliers are part of a well-planned communication strategy; they should include your key message, website address, and union and building rep contact information.

Robocalls

Everyone knows what a robocall is: You answer your phone, wait a half second, and then hear a recorded message from your member of Congress or a nationally known politician endorsing a candidate for, say, county dog catcher. The effectiveness of robocalls has been widely debated, but they are still a mainstay of getting out political and legislative messages. Robocalls can be very effective if they are short, are used infrequently, and deliver a salient message at the very beginning of the recording. While they have been shown repeatedly to have no effect on voter turnout, they are most effective for reminding people of a rally, telephone town hall or other event, or letting people know a specific piece of information, such as a controversial vote by an elected official. Robocalls are cheap or, in some cases, free to do.

Visibility

Visual displays of issue support bring members together and invite media coverage. Creating a visual show of support spreads the message to co-workers and the community, and solicits engagement of additional supporters. Some examples are: union T-shirt day, yard signs, wrist bands, stickers and buttons. Several years ago, hundreds of thousands of “Pink Hearts, Not Pink Slips” buttons made their way into the hands of members, potential members and community supporters and garnered media attention across the country. The buttons gave members a positive way to channel their frustrations and show solidarity. It is crucial, however, not to reallocate people from field contacts (doors, phones, worksites) to visibility events.

MEDIUM-INTENSITY ACTIVITIES

Click to Call



The AFT has effectively used a “click-to-call” service that is embedded in emails in political campaigns that need quick action and timely responses. Recipients of the email are asked to click on a link to place a call to their legislator or other elected representative. A script or set of talking points is provided in the email. This system allows AFT members and supporters to simply click once to connect them with the appropriate elected official. You can use this tactic to track active supporters and call upon them for additional actions later. Please contact Brandon Boswell at bboswell@aft.org for more information and setup.

Live Member-to-Member Calls (Phone Banks)

In phone banks, activists, armed with a script and phone list, call and educate members on an issue. Each call includes talking with members about the issue at hand, then asking them to do something—e.g., volunteer, make a COPE contribution or go over a vote plan. In some states, your union can call nonmembers and the general public about issues as long as the call does not advocate voting for or against a specific candidate.

There are several types of phone banks: paper phone banks, virtual phone banks and phone banks with predictive dialers.

1. Paper phone banks are traditional phone banks where callers dial numbers by hand from a list. Later (hopefully), someone enters the collected data back into the system so that we don't waste our time calling wrong numbers, re-engaging nonsupporters or calling the same person the next day!
2. Virtual phone banks eliminate the need for separate data entry. Callers receive a Labor Action Network (LAN) login and password, select the virtual phone bank, see the script and the member's phone number on the screen, dial the phone number, and record the outcome of the conversation right then and there by clicking on the appropriate boxes and radio buttons ("not home," "wrong number," "will volunteer," etc.). Virtual phone banks do not have any additional cost, but they do require a separate computer terminal and phone for each caller. The AFT political department is happy to set this up for you or to show you how to do it yourself.
3. Predictive dialers also eliminate the need for separate data entry. This system dials the phone numbers automatically, enabling more phone conversations per hour. Callers record conversation results immediately.

IVR Polling

Interactive voice response (IVR) polls or surveys can provide you with modern, cost-effective, reliable voter opinion data results. IVR polling does not use a live caller asking questions, making it significantly less expensive than regular polling. With an IVR poll, your universe is contacted with a list of prerecorded questions and answers. Respondents indicate their answers by pressing numbers corresponding to answers. The response rate with IVR is relatively high, and the results have been repeatedly validated as accurate.

Patch-Through Calls

Patch-through calls are automated or live phone calls that give recipients the option to directly connect with the key legislators whose vote you want to affect. A call recipient listens to a pre-recorded or live message and can opt to be connected to a legislator's office to advocate your union's position on that issue.

Direct Mail

A letter from a local union president to the membership, in an individually addressed envelope, has been shown time and again to be among the most effective types of communication. Other options include a simple postcard to members, a handwritten note card to legislators, and a slick mailer with a traceable, pre-addressed tear-off postcard the member can mail to legislators. Direct mail, whether broadly or narrowly targeted, can speak directly and graphically to political, community, professional and other issues. Direct mail messaging should be short and compelling. Handwritten notes, whether to targeted legislative committee members or to 10,000 targeted community members, have the additional advantage of being more likely to be read than direct mail, because they are personal.

Interviews

Reporters need help finding sources and color for the stories they are reporting, so have a list of rank-and file members, activists and leaders ready to offer to reporters upon request. Brief your spokespeople on your union's strategic message, and give them an opportunity to practice being interviewed. Make sure members always identify themselves as union members. As with all earned media, you'll have to work to get a reporter's attention, so make sure you pitch stories and promote members for relevant stories.

Twitter

Twitter is another social networking tool that makes it extremely easy to set up an account and share quick bits of information with supporters and potential supporters. Twitter is much easier to use than Facebook, and many people post tweets right from their cellphones. While Twitter doesn't encourage as much deep interaction and networking as Facebook, it is a very effective tool, especially to avid tweeters and Twitter followers.

Facebook

Unlike TV, radio, direct mail and even your website, social networking sites are not advertisements—the key to successfully using social media is through engagement. Posting news stories, connecting with new people, answering questions and hosting events through Facebook are just a few of the ways it can be used in your issue campaign. Keep in mind that your Facebook page should be a part of your plan, not the entirety of your plan. Your message should be consistent throughout your social media, paid media, earned media, website, etc. Your Facebook presence should be

branded properly—that means your color schemes should match as much as possible, and your voice and tone should be consistent and constantly monitored and maintained.



Text Messaging

Nearly all cellphone users have now become acquainted with text messaging—using either their mobile phone or an updated device that facilitates text messaging. Using members’ phone numbers to text is fairly new territory, and, in most states, cellphone users must “opt in” to receive text updates from an organization. Once potential supporters or members have opted in, you can send brief, to-the-point messages to them. Messages can be used to make an “ask,” remind supporters of an event or pass along a news tidbit. You can also suggest that members forward the text-asks to others, but make sure you’ve included an “ask” that is easy to do. Election Day text messages have been shown to be effective in increasing voter turnout.

The AFT offers affiliates use of text messaging for campaigns or events. Affiliates can send timely communications about campaigns, events or breaking news—straight to their members’ cell phones.

Letters to the Editor / Op-Eds

Editorial and opinion pages are among the most frequently read pages in newspapers and magazines. Unions that regularly encourage members and allies to send letters to the editor get a lot of bang for little effort. Editors and reporters receive dozens of press releases every day; sharp and crisply written letters of support or opposition have a good chance of getting published. Use your elected leaders, community friends, members and affiliate leaders. Submit often. Your communication team can write dozens and give them to potential senders with addressed, stamped envelopes or, better yet, have them submit letters online.

Advocacy

Members or affiliate leaders set up meetings, such as Activist for Congressional Education (ACE) meetings, with key elected officials to discuss a legislative issue important to our union. This way, legislators are meeting with their constituents (who are also union members) in their offices about issues that are important to you. Make sure you provide background information and talking points to members who will attend these meetings, as well as a packet of information on your issues that they can leave with the legislator. These meetings should be regularly scheduled and should focus on specific bills during a session or on a series of general issues when there is not a specific bill to support or fight. Sometimes affiliates will hold or sponsor a lobby day, where members gather at the state capitol for a rally and then meet with their respective legislators.

One-on-One Member Education / Worksite Mobilization

Sometimes our members feel freer to communicate in the worksite about legislative issues than they do about political candidates. In this age of smartphones, members can even ask other members or nonmembers to perform an action on the spot. Arming your membership and building reps with talking points, fliers, “asks” and a directive to engage in conversations with their fellow members can work both to create buzz and to achieve actions. One-on-one issue education has proven to be the single most effective way to educate our members.

Worksite visits have been shown time and again to be the most effective mechanism to increase voter turnout. It is the most significant role we can play; anyone can send a robocall or a piece of slick mail, but only unions can talk to members at work about the issues and the importance of voting.

HIGH-INTENSITY ACTIVITIES

Telephone Town Halls

Affiliate leaders and members have held their own town hall meetings on key issues and also participated in televised town halls run by national news organizations. The town hall meeting can be a powerful way to lead on an issue that’s affecting members. Additionally, it’s a great way to hear from members. Telephone town halls can help enlist, engage and get feedback from members. Participants can ask questions, offer opinions, sign up to volunteer or join your text messaging program, and so on. After the event, participants can leave a recording with feedback for the leadership or a

voicemail that can be sent to elected officials or other targets. Interested in hosting one for your members? A planning guide is available on LeaderNet (for registered users) or by contacting your regional political desk.



Webinars & Conference Calls

MaestroConference is an interactive web conferencing platform that provides secure webinars and call services for up to 500 participants per event. Individualized call information is provided to each registered call participant, which allows the host to track participation and engagement in real time. For more information or to create an account, contact Brandon Boswell at bboswell@aft.org.

Speaking Engagements

Track community news and events, and seek opportunities to speak. This is another area in which to be proactive—you don't have to wait for someone to ask you. Make sure your speech is tight, and weave a story around key messages. Encourage members to suggest themselves or union leaders to address other community or faith-based organizations to which they belong.

Blogs

Blogs are a type of website or part of a website typically maintained by one person who makes regular entries consisting of his or her opinion, news, video and other materials. What separates a blog from other electronic news media is its interactive feature—readers can add their own comments and responses. Starting a blog is labor-intensive. To operate successfully, a blog needs to be “fed” and monitored daily. A better way to use blogs in your legislative campaign is to identify blogs that are widely read and/or focus specifically on your issue or constituency. Then, contribute your own carefully crafted message and comment regularly. Bloggers should be added to all of your press lists.

Labor Walks

Activists visit members at home, discuss the issue or campaign with them, and ask them to take action. By giving your activists a script, a map of member homes and a simple training, your union can launch a highly effective campaign with immediate results. Second only to worksite visits, canvassing is the most effective way to increase voter turnout. Do not leave literature on the doorstep; that is the most expensive form of mail. Take a few extra minutes to knock and wait to see if someone is home. If no one is home, leave a personalized note for the intended recipient, such as “Dear Sue and Gail, I’m sorry I missed you. Please remember to vote on Tuesday, May 15!” Such personalized touches have been shown to raise voter turnout.

Events

Town halls, roundtables, panels and rallies are great opportunities to engage members and strengthen your union's resolve. Often, we create events for members only. Partnering with other organizations and giving voice to your specific issue under the banner of “community issues” affords you a broader, more diverse audience and better news coverage. Engage community organizations that also have major political or legislative issues coming up, and ask them to partner with you on a panel or speaker series.

ADVERTISING / MARKETING

Earned Media

The single most important rule for getting the media to cover your legislative campaign is that you must “create news.” Most campaigns fail to understand that just because you say something is newsworthy does not make it news. The only events, announcements, statements, speeches or other items the media will cover are those that are newsworthy. Reporters need a constant stream of newsworthy items to report on or they're out of a job. Be the media's friend—offer them true news, and they'll be more than happy to report it to their viewers and readers, which gives you free, credible publicity for your issue campaign. Announce your message far and wide quickly via the media. Be factual, stay focused on your key message and incorporate a visual element whenever possible. And don't forget to include the blogosphere.

Need a media contact list? The media affairs team in the AFT communications department can pull that together for you. Contact AFT media affairs for assistance.



Paid Media

Among the most expensive tactics, using paid media allows you to control your message and deliver it quickly. If used properly, paid media can be highly effective. Repetition is key, so if you go this route, don't underinvest.

Print Ads

Print ads are not targeted to the individual level but can be an effective means of communicating a message, especially when trying to build community support. Review all periodicals and publications in your community to identify a paper or newsletter with high readership. Often in smaller, community or neighborhood publications you can reach a targeted group of people, and the cost of the ad will be considerably less than in a major citywide publication.

Online Ads

Targeted advertisements are based on user interests. Banner, Google, Facebook and local news outlet websites are just a few venues for online ads; these ads can be inexpensive and highly targeted. Ads should be part of your strategic communication plan and focused on your message. Make sure you match the online venue with the type of campaign you are trying to move: e.g., local websites for local campaigns.

Radio Ads

Radio ads are an effective tool for delivering your message to a broad audience. Featuring parents, teachers and community leaders, ads can convey the depth of support for your initiative and help persuade the broader community to support your cause. Radio ads can drive traffic to your website, engaging more people in the campaign.

Television Ads

Some issues require us to reach a wider audience than is possible on radio or the Internet alone. We can create television advertisements and media plans to get our message out. TV ads are expensive but can be targeted to key media markets and reach a broader audience than possible through any other means. They are widely believed to be one of the most effective means of conveying a message to the general public.

YouTube

Creating a compelling visual can aid in driving a campaign message. Videos are a great way to reach a broader network. YouTube.com is one of the five biggest sites in the world. Use videos to tell a personal story or give voice to your members on a particular issue.

SUPPLEMENTS

Sponsorships

A number of strategies can be used to engage community groups; one of the easiest is by sponsoring their events. Buy a table at a potential partner's event or sign onto an event where the issue may not directly relate to the AFT. Sponsorships can also lead to speaking roles at the event. Other organizations will be glad for your support, and, like us, they always appreciate a crowd at their event.

Tchotchkes

Offering tchotchkes or "chum" is an age-old method of using products to entice engagement. For as long as there have been political and issue campaigns, there've been accompanying T-shirts, bumper stickers, posters, key chains, hats, buttons and the like. Chum can serve as a thank-you or reward to members who volunteer or attend an event. However, it can be expensive and should be used sparingly unless a clear media visual or legislative action can be achieved by its use.