



Human Rights Messaging: Where's the Cutting Edge?

IHRFG Semi-Annual Meeting, San Francisco, California
Monday, January 25, 2009, 12:00 – 1:30pm

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Participants put their minds together informally to share perspectives and contacts about innovative communication—including examples utilizing video, social media and new media—about human rights. We discussed how emerging tools have proven effective in capturing ‘hearts and minds’ in relation to the human rights issues of our day.

Human rights messaging

- How can we refract the ‘issues of our day’ – such as immigration reform, border issues, national security, criminal justice, access to health care – through a human rights lens? How can we integrate human rights into current thinking on these issues?
 - Opportunity Agenda’s toolkit *Talking Human Rights in the United States* is recommended:
http://opportunityagenda.org/files/field_file/HumanRightsToolkit%282009%29_0.pdf
- How do we communicate effectively when public opinions are driven by news coverage? When “hearts and minds” are already captured against you?
- Whom may we invoke as effective “champions” in our communication about human rights?
- How can we communicate without capitulating to the sensationalism that is rampant in our world?
- How can we integrate racial justice and gender equity into all our communication? How can we as funders serve as unrelenting champions of racial justice and gender equity in all public spaces?
- How can we distinguish between messaging that is effective on a short-term vs. long-term horizon (Rethink Media is a resource)
- What kinds of impact assessment of messaging has proven helpful? (e.g., gay rights movement analysis of communication related to ballot initiatives, which didn’t reach more than three percent of target audience)

Social media

- What are the uses of social media to advance human rights work?
 - As organizing tool: build and engage new constituencies

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- Capture 'hearts and minds' through new tools
- Make connections and advocate for policy reform
- What are the new 'tools of our day' that we may mobilize?
 - Social networking
 - Phone banking
 - List building
 - Soap operas
 - Community radio
 - Video
- What examples have you seen of effective use of video? Social media?

Communications capacity building

- What resources are available (including intermediaries and training organizations) to build the capacity of grantees and their communications infrastructure?
 - Bear in mind that louder does not equal better
 - Tailor messaging to specific constituencies vs. broader public sphere
 - Strategically segment 'publics'
- Examples:
 - Opportunity Agenda provides useful tools and services regarding practical and effective communication
 - Provides analysis of what key messages work and don't
 - Communications toolkits
 - Rethink Media offers "communications hub" approach in strategic communications consulting
 - Analysis of effectiveness of messages, polling, rapid response, media training
- How might we envision moving people along a spectrum of: skeptics → supporters → champions

Equity and Access

- How do we address the digital divide?
 - Are new fault lines being drawn in regard to access to social media?
 - How do we leverage the forms of media that underserved communities actually use (e.g., text messaging among people of color, radio broadcasts with closed captioning)
- What technologies (in terms of design and transmission) can we define as feminist? Conducive to movement building and realizing human rights?
 - Important to examine operating systems in this light
- How can we bring a human rights critique to bear on the new tools of social media? (e.g., 70% of Wikipedia entries are written by men)

Transforming the field of human rights

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- How can we break down the 'silos' within the human rights world through effective communications? Can media create a 'tipping point'?
- How might we bring to bear the new tools of our day – especially video – in relation to marginalized and stigmatized communities?
 - Move beyond negative framing (myopic focus on violations) to humanize these groups – e.g., social media campaign filming sex workers answering questions about their everyday lives, concerns, hopes, dreams, etc.
 - How can we train marginalized groups to use media effectively, and what types of technology lend themselves to providing meaningful, low-cost access
 - How can we use media to change 'hearts and minds' in relation to such issues as drug policy reform, sex work, reproductive health
- What are the key elements or ingredients needed to craft an effective story of social change (i.e., social context, compelling stories of individuals, metrics, etc.)
- Technology has paved the way for unprecedented transparency. How can human rights movements leverage new levels of transparency to drive change in such areas as the extractive industries and international aid?

Foundation communications

- How do funders use their websites and blogs effectively?
- How do we work with grantees to tell the story of our work?
- How do we integrate the tools of social media in our grant making processes (e.g., apply our present work using social media platforms)

Funding human rights communication

- How do we examine and evaluate the use of culture (art, film, dance, etc.) in our human rights grant making portfolios?
- What works and doesn't about building communications work and/or capacity building into grants?