



# SECTION 2

# Community Outreach &

# Partnerships

# Building a Communications Plan

## Why is a communication plan needed?

Despite the fast-paced method that communication occurs and the variety of mediums used, it remains important for organizations to take the time in advance to plan what the message is they want to communicate and identify for whom the message is intended to reach. A communication plan no matter how simple or elaborate is essential to any organization that is trying to communicate a message to its intended audience. With a plan, an organization can better ensure that the right message is communicated to the right audience at the right time.

## Components of an effective communication plan include:

**Who:** Who are you trying reach with your message? Who needs the information your organization has? Do you have more than one target audience? Who will talk with media? Is s/he knowledgeable about the topic or event?

### TIP:

Organizations may want to consider using trusted volunteers or youth who were formerly homeless to talk with media about the importance of a youth count. When a policy issue is seen through a personal account, it can make the issue more timely and easy to understand. If using youth or volunteers to be spokespeople, it is very important to adequately prepare them through role play scenarios about how to speak to reporters. Also, ensure that spokespeople are available for the entirety of the event so media coverage is maximized.

**What:** What do you want to accomplish by generating attention or publicity? What is your goal? Is the goal measurable (e.g. 3 newspaper articles)? What are the benefits or challenges to gaining media coverage? What is your message? Is the message easy to understand? What type of media are you trying to attract?

### TIP:

Using media to announce a homeless youth count has benefits and challenges. One one hand, media coverage is an efficient and effective way to spread the word quickly about a youth count. However, homeless youth are a vulnerable population that often likes to stay hidden. Announcing a youth count may have a negative effect and cause youth to avoid an event where cameras or reporters are present. Organization may consider using media outlets to increase awareness of *Youth Count Texas!* and its purpose, but keep the date of the actual count confidential.

**Where:** Where do you want the media to go? Think about how a location will work best for different media (radio, television, newspaper, on-line).

## **TIP:**

If the location is difficult to find, then provide directions to it. Organizations should consider appointing someone to look out for media upon their arrival at the event and direct them to the appropriate spokespeople.

**When:** When do you want media coverage to begin/end about your event? Identify the time of the event as well as when the best time it would be for media to arrive. Organizers should be considerate of reporters' time and recognize that they have deadlines to meet and other responsibilities.

**Why:** Why does your organization want media coverage? Why is your event important to the community?

## **TIP:**

Media organizations may have limited staff and resources on any given day. To ensure your event is covered, be sure to identify strong rationale in advance to media outlets for its coverage. Organizations should thoughtfully consider whether to hold an event on a weekend or near a holiday because many media organizations, especially in rural communities, operate with limited staff during these times.

**How:** How will your organization communicate with media before, during, and after the event? Are materials (press releases, fact sheets, etc.) for the media needed in advance of the event? How will the communication plan updated? How will responsibility for the communication be determined?