

## Governor's Office Onboarding Guide: Communications

### **Overview**

The role of the gubernatorial communications office is one of the most difficult and rewarding in the statehouse. An effective communications operation is vital for a successful, productive tenure as governor.

The communications staff must work with the media to facilitate communication with constituents about the governor's actions, policies, positions, and initiatives. Without an efficient communications operation, the work of the governor and his or her staff can get lost in the fast-paced, around-the-clock news cycle.

The media—whether small local newspapers or national television networks—carry information to the public about the governor's work on important state issues. The job of the communications office is to provide media with timely, relevant information about the governor's priorities and actions.

The importance of developing and implementing an effective communications strategy cannot be emphasized enough. Web-based access to information, including news organizations' websites and blogs, have resulted in a faster pace of coverage and the need for governors' offices to respond quickly.

Effective media coverage can convey the message that a governor is doing a good job and his or her initiatives have meaningful, positive impacts on the lives of state residents. Supportive media coverage can improve a governor's ability to lead by demonstrating to the public the value of his or her service and agenda. Negative media coverage can undermine a governor's efforts and could jeopardize his or her reelection.

The political implications are clear. A governor who is seen as caring, capable, and effective is more likely to have a long and productive career in government than a governor who is seen as detached, indecisive, or ineffective. However, there are limits to what communications alone can achieve. A communications strategy cannot substitute for worthwhile progress or inspiring ideas. Nor can a communications staff convey the goals of the governor and his or her administration if they are not clearly outlined.

An administration's goals and priorities should be identified early and incorporated into the communications strategy. One way to do this is to identify two or three key themes or goals that will be prominent throughout the term, repeat those themes or goals often, and make them a focus of future initiatives. An effective communications strategy, grounded in solid media relations managed by a talented communications staff will help the governor communicate his or her priorities to the citizens of the state and ultimately leave office remembered for his or her many accomplishments.

### **Organization and Staffing**

The communications strategy must be an integral part of the governor's office operations, and it must be linked closely with every other function. Opportunities for media coverage can spring from many sources, including gubernatorial priorities, proclamations, invitations, new legislation, and constituent concerns, among others. The communications office must be aware of upcoming events on the governor's schedule and emerging issues being considered within the administration.

The breadth of responsibilities included in the communications strategy will determine the size of the communications office staff. Before staffing

decisions can be made, however, the governor will need to decide what role he or she wants the communications staff to play, and how he or she will interact with them.

## **Determining the Appropriate Communications Staff**

The role of the governor's communications office will depend largely on the governor's style and interests. Some governors want an assertive, proactive media relations program that offers a high media profile and includes frequent interviews, news conferences, special events, and appearances. Other governors prefer a more low-key approach, responding to events that are offered, speaking through other members of the staff and holding periodic news conferences. The appropriate size for a communications office will depend on the governor's preferences and the office's level of interaction with media.

While communications staffs vary from one gubernatorial office to another, there are several positions that typically comprise the communications office. The communications director is usually responsible for the overall communications strategy and is a member of the governor's senior staff. As the primary communications strategist, the communications director helps the governor think through the political, governmental, and legislative implications of the messages that are delivered to key audiences through the media and public events.

Some communications directors have broad responsibility and authority that extend beyond the governor's office. In a few states, the communications director hires and supervises the public information officers who work in the executive branch agencies. This approach gives the governor valuable resources and ensures he or she will not be surprised or embarrassed by something that appears in the media from an agency. Many offices also employ a press secretary (or in large offices more than one) who reports to the communications director. The role of the press secretary is to proactively disseminate information to reporters, respond to media inquiries,

prepare communications materials, and organize news events. Another more junior communications staff, called a press aide or communications assistant, may report to the press secretary or communications director and perform administrative tasks such as maintaining media lists and supporting the communications staff.

A small office may *only* have a press secretary who wears all hats.

In offices where staff members may perform many different functions, the individual handling the press duties may have a title such as assistant to the governor or special assistant. In some states, the senior communications aide may also be responsible for research, speechwriting, special tasks, program development, policy research and development, or briefing the governor on various issues.

Regardless of title, it is critical that the primary communications staff member can think strategically and has complete access to the governor.

## **Selecting Communications Staff Members**

The function of the lead communicator, whether called a communications director or press secretary, is one of the few activities in the governor's office that bears a strong resemblance to the same activity in the campaign. For that reason, many governors appoint the campaign communications director or press secretary to the governor's communications office.

Other governors choose as their first communications director or press secretary someone with a background in news media, or someone who has worked in public relations or public affairs.

Once the lead communicator is chosen by the governor, that individual will likely be responsible for filling other communications roles, and may want to choose individuals with strong media relations, digital communications, and writing skills.

## ***Roles and Responsibilities***

Key decisions about tasks and operations can greatly influence how the governor's communications office will contribute to the governor's agenda and administration priorities. It is important to develop lines of communication within the governor's communications office and among this office and other individuals and agencies, including the governor's senior staff and cabinet agencies. The goals and priorities of the communications strategy will need to be identified along with the role senior staff must play to help ensure its success.

### **Common Responsibilities of the Communications Office**

Gubernatorial communications offices typically have four major roles and responsibilities. They serve as the media's point of contact, write speeches and messaging, maintain an online media presence, and develop promotional materials.

- **Serve as the media's point of contact.** In almost all states, the communications office serves as a point of contact for members of the media who have questions about the governor's policies and actions or who want to schedule time with the governor. The office arranges news conferences, prepares news releases, and advises the governor and staff members on potential media reaction to proposed policies.
- **Write Speeches and Messaging.** Most communications offices are responsible for drafting the governor's speeches and messaging. Even when this responsibility is carried out by an individual or an office other than the communications office the senior communications aide usually reviews speeches and messages proposed for the governor's use. In many states, the governor's communications office also prepares and publicizes proclamations.

- **Maintain Online Media Presence.** Because of the increasing popularity of the web and social media, an increasingly important function of the senior communications aide is leading online communications. Communications offices are now responsible for managing the governor's website, blogs, and social media, which can serve as important media and constituent outreach tools.
- **Develop Promotional Materials.** The communications office is often responsible for the materials developed to promote the governor and his or her important programs, including brochures, press kits, and flyers.

### **The Governor's Role in the Communications Strategy**

A pivotal decision at the beginning of a gubernatorial administration is to determine the role the governor will play in the communications strategy. Some governors are natural public speakers who thrive in the media spotlight. Such governors will be highly visible during their term of office, and the media strategy will focus on creating opportunities in which they can interact directly with the media. Other governors are less comfortable dealing directly with the media. They may prefer to appoint someone who acts as spokesperson for the administration in most instances. In some administrations, the governor's chief of staff and top cabinet officials serve as spokespersons. In other states, the senior communications aide generally speaks for the administration.

The communications strategy should also be designed to reflect the governor's style and natural talents. If the governor has a strong speaking voice and is most comfortable working from written remarks, the media relations program can emphasize the use of radio programs and interviews. If the governor is best at informal, off-the-cuff remarks, opportunities can be sought in which he or she can use that talent. In addition to clarifying the governor's involvement in the communications strategy, the communications office needs input and

guidance from the governor to establish policies for engaging with media, the relationship between the communications office and cabinet agencies, and the role of the primary communicator, such as:

- **Establish clear Policies for Media Relations.** The governor, through the communications office, must develop ground rules to determine:
  - Who in the administration may speak to the media;
  - Who may speak on behalf of the governor and under what circumstances;
  - Who needs to review speeches, press releases, and policy statements; and
  - What the relationship will be among the communications office and the governor's policy development staff, the governor's scheduler, top-level staff in the governor's office, and cabinet agencies.

## **Manage the Public Information and Media Relations Efforts of Cabinet Agencies**

The governor also needs to establish a relationship between his or her communications office and the cabinet agencies. Some of the issues to be resolved include:

- The degree of control the governor wants to maintain over the public information and media relations efforts of cabinet agencies;
- How information will move between the communications office and these agencies; and
- How the work of these agencies will fit into the governor's overall communications strategy.

## **Define the Role of the Primary Communicator**

Another major decision involves the role the senior communications aide—and the communications office—will play in the administration. Some of the decisions that must be made include:

- Will the communications director or press secretary act solely as spokesperson?
- Will he or she manage day-to-day activities in the governor's press office?
- Will he or she play a part in developing policies and strategies as well as conveying them to the media and the public?
- Will he or she have other important responsibilities that do not relate directly to media relations, such as coordinating policy research or development or overseeing constituent services?

Roles sometimes played by the governor's senior communications aide include policy advisor, constituent services liaison, department liaison, and governor's designee on committees.

## **Chain of Command between the Governor and Senior Communications Aide**

The relationship between the governor and the senior communications aide varies among states. Almost without exception, the senior communications aide reports directly to the governor. Some also report to someone in addition to the governor, usually the chief of staff.

Although the senior communications aide deals directly with the governor to develop media strategies and craft responses to media inquiries, it is critical that other senior staff members are actively engaged in the process.

In states where the chief of staff plays a strong role, the senior communications aide probably receives more substantive guidance from this person than from the governor directly. In states where the chief of staff plays a different role, the senior communications aide not only has ready access to the governor, but also can be voice in policy decisions.

A new governor needs to consider what roles he or she would like the senior communications aide to play. One approach is for the senior communications aide to

serve as one of the senior members of the governor's group of advisors. The senior communications aide would be invited to all major meetings, listen in on discussions that may have press implications, and discuss with the governor matters such as overall administration strategy.

Another approach is to have the senior communications aide participate in the deliberations that lead up to major administration decisions, but limit his or her role to commenting on certain points, such as how the press is likely to react to the alternatives being considered. When potential press reaction is not a factor in the decision, the senior communications aide would not attend meetings with the governor.

There are several arguments for each approach. The senior communications aide who has been involved in the decision-making process will be in a better position to explain the decision and why various alternatives were rejected. His or her participation will also facilitate the writing of press releases and statements announcing decisions.

In addition, many state policies are developed in response to news and editorial items, while other policies are developed as statements and included in press releases. These factors can make it difficult for a senior communications aide who is far removed from the decision-making process. Alternatively, some communication staffers see their role as a policy reporter rather than a policymaker. When it comes to certain issue areas, it can be more of a hindrance than a benefit for the senior communications aide to face the media and have detailed prior knowledge on specific aspects of policy development. No matter which approach is selected, the senior communications aide needs to work to maintain a constant, two-way flow of information.

## Goals and Priorities

Developing the primary lines of communication within the governor's communications office is just

the first step in developing a strong communications program. Clear goals and priorities need to be identified for the communications strategy, and every member of the governor's senior staff needs to understand how he or she will contribute.

The process of identifying goals and priorities for the governor's communications strategy will be similar and concurrent to the process used to establish the governor's scheduling and legislative affairs systems and priorities. Many of the components of these programs overlap. Essentially, the governor's senior staff, including the senior communications aide, needs to:

- Identify the governor's goals and determine how they can be accomplished through the scheduling, communications, and legislative programs;
- Determine the role the governor wants to play in planning the schedule, including regular speaking engagements, media interviews, and press conferences;
- Resolve who has the authority to schedule the governor for press conferences and other media-related events;
- Determine the time the governor wants to spend on media-related activities, including regularly scheduled media availabilities;
- Find ways in which the governor's schedule can be used to take advantage of special media opportunities; and
- Agree how the governor's communications strategy can set the stage and create public support for the governor's legislative goals.

Once these decisions have been made, the information needs to be communicated to every member of the governor's staff.

## Governor's Senior Staff and the Media

One important decision any new administration needs to make is how members of the governor's staff will handle their contact with the media. In most states, the senior communications aide is the initial point of contact for reporters who want to arrange

time with the governor. The practice varies, however, when reporters want to communicate with other members of the governor's staff. Many communications offices also handle these contacts, though the governor may prefer some staff members, like a chief of staff to deal directly with reporters.

Once the initial contact is made, the question becomes whether staff members are authorized to answer anything other than routine questions without first consulting the communications office. In many states, the staff member clears the interview with the senior communications aide before responding. Whether clearance is required will depend on the staff member involved, the nature of the inquiry, and the governor's preference.

A policy for dealing with press inquiries is formulated to prevent the administration from getting off message or responding with contradictory information, and to avoid preempting activities or statements being planned by the senior communications aide. At a minimum, the communications office should always be alerted when staff schedule interviews or meetings with reporters and be briefed on the topics they discussed in case follow-up with the reporter is required.

## **Cabinet Agencies and the Media**

Much of the governor's agenda will be carried out through the cabinet agencies that oversee various components of the administration. Many governors believe they will be judged, in part, by the effectiveness of these agencies. Every new administration will need to determine how cabinet-level activities fit into the governor's communications strategy and what role the governor's communications office will play in them. The communications office of the governor is not generally the press information center for all of state government, though in some states the governor's communications director has broad authority that extends to cabinet agencies.

At a minimum, the governor's office should be informed in advance of any potentially embarrassing problems or disclosures. The agencies also off the

governor a chance to announce positive news or show how his or her programs are working.

Many press secretaries regularly review proposed news releases and major speeches from departments and agencies.

Clear guidelines should be developed to determine:

- Exactly what news the governor wants to release on behalf of the cabinet agencies;
- How the agencies fit into the communications strategy;
- What materials and/or media contacts need to be reviewed or cleared by the governor's communications office (e.g., speeches, interviews, press releases, and speaking engagements); and
- How the review process will be carried out.

Even if the governor does not require cabinet officials to obtain prior approval for media releases and statements, it is critical he or she be kept apprised of all cabinet agency developments.

One tool is a monthly meeting or conference call with all public information officers representing state agencies. Regular monthly contact provides a valuable forum to discuss key issues in the cabinet agencies and learn about any cross-departmental issues. This not only informs the governor's senior communications aide, but also provides another outlet to reinforce the governor's primary messages or seek news opportunities that otherwise might be overlooked.

## ***Techniques and Tools***

The public perception of the governor and his or her administration is created day by day, in large and small ways. Many of these impressions will be communicated through the media. Communications staff will want to rely on several techniques to enhance coverage of the governor. To carry the governor's message, the communications strategy can take advantage of numerous tools. The tool must fit the message and the communications strategy

should take into account the needs, interests, and deadlines of the various news mediums.

## **Techniques to Enhance Media Coverage of the Governor**

To effectively serve the governor and the administration, the governor's communications staff must adhere to certain requirements of media relations. Specifically, they need to:

- Maintain credibility and timeliness with the press;
- Deal fairly with all media; and
- Establish a positive working relationship with reporters.

## **Maintain Credibility and Timeliness with the Press**

A press secretary must be believed by the press to be effective. He or she will not be considered credible if past answers have proven incorrect because of an error or lack of candor. Perhaps the most important piece of advice veteran communications staff can offer their new counterparts is to maintain their credibility and that of the governor.

Maintaining credibility would be relatively simple if the press secretary had complete access to everyone in the administration at all times and had sufficient time to prepare answers. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to have all the necessary information. If a press secretary needs to provide more information for a reporter, it should be done quickly—so the reporter can meet the deadline—and completely. Leaving telephone messages unanswered is the worst thing a press secretary can do. It creates the appearance that the governor's office is unresponsive or indifferent. Even if the information is not yet available, the reporter needs to know the press secretary is working to acquire the information.

## **Deal Fairly with All News Media**

Press secretaries also need to deal fairly with all members of the media. Daily newspapers, weekly newspapers, and radio and television programs all have different needs, interests, and deadlines. It is important to schedule news conferences and events

with these needs in mind. For example, events should be scheduled so the broadcast media can attend and still have time to produce the segment for the next news slot.

Some governors have adopted the practice of visiting periodically with the editorial boards of major newspapers, television stations, and radio stations. These meetings are usually off-the-record sessions that give the governor an opportunity to explain his or her ideas in depth. The result is nearly always better coverage in the weeks and months that follow and a deeper understanding by the media of the governor's goals and policies. (In these situations, press secretaries should always clarify the status of the meeting immediately before it begins. They may also want to consider audio taping the meeting for later reference.)

## **Establish a Positive Working Relationship with Reporters**

Many press secretaries consider themselves to be advocates who attempt to convince reporters of the merits of the administration's actions, seek to correct erroneous information, and try to improve the interpretation of existing information. At the same time, the press secretary can serve as an information source for the administration in understanding the needs or concerns of the press corps.

The press secretary often serves two different constituencies. Effectively serving the governor and administration requires a good relationship with the media. To be effective with both constituencies, the press secretary must represent the media's needs to the governor and argue the governor's views to the media.

Press secretaries worry about one-sided stories that contain unfavorable comments about the administration without explaining its viewpoint. Most agree this problem is less likely to occur when positive relationships have been established with the media and when the governor is known to be sensitive to the needs, interests, and deadlines of the press. It is hard to blame a reporter for not presenting the governor's side of a developing story if he or she

could not reach anyone who could express the governor's point of view. If a press secretary has worked hard to establish an open and trusting relationship with a reporter, that reporter probably will make an extra effort to provide both sides of the story.

## **Media Training**

Although a new governor and the communications staff became accustomed to talking to the press during the campaign, other key staff members or new agency heads may be unfamiliar with how to work effectively with members of the media. Some may avoid the media, or they may not have a clear understanding about how press coverage relates to their jobs.

A new governor may want to offer media training for the communications staff, his or her senior staff, and key agency or department heads. This will enable these individuals to learn key elements of communicating with all types of media and help them design messages that fit specific media.

The focus of training with outside professionals could include:

- How to keep on message and use the sound bite to greatest advantage;
- How to appear relaxed and effective on television;
- The best preparation methods for the different needs of print, radio, and television interviews; and
- The use and correct design of graphics (size, readability, etc.) and other visuals for television news conferences and special events.

Training also could include discussions of how the communications office will work with other departments and agencies. Gubernatorial staff members who speak the language of the reporters and can appreciate the tools and constraints of the media will be better able to build effective working relationships with them.

## ***A Crisis Communications Plan***

Every governor hopes his or her state will never face a statewide emergency, but emergencies do occur. Whether it is a ruptured dam that floods a town, an unexpected environmental emergency, or a major accident, the governor's office needs to be prepared to respond effectively to the situation. One important component of emergency management is to develop a crisis communications plan. The governor's communications office should work closely with state emergency management personnel to develop a strategy that can work in different situations.

Some fundamental rules apply in all situations:

- The governor should be kept informed of developments as they occur;
- Before a crisis, "need-to-know" officials should be identified and a list with their contact information should be circulated;
- The governor should designate a single spokesperson to serve as the point of contact for all information requests; and
- A policy of dealing directly and honestly with inquiries should be put into place.

The basic groundwork for such a plan may be available from the state emergency management agency. The governor and his or her communications staff should consider existing plans to see whether they fit current needs or whether they need to develop a new plan. It is important to do this early in the administration, before an emergency occurs. A written crisis communications plan should be distributed to every person on the governor's staff and agency personnel who will play a role in implementing the plan during a crisis.

## **Tools to Carry the Governor's Message**

The media can have access to the governor through speeches, interviews, press conferences, state-of-the-state or budget messages, radio interviews and television satellite feeds, and testimony before the legislature. When preparing to communicate a message to the media, it is important to take into account the different needs, deadlines, and interests of the various segments of the media. The needs of daily



newspapers differ from those of weekly newspapers, and the needs of national television networks differ from those of local television stations or online media.

A communications strategy should be anchored by the key messages the governor wants to communicate. Every issue or program the governor has identified as a priority should have talking points that guide the development of materials that will eventually be distributed to the media and perhaps to other key target audiences.

Once messaging has been developed, an important aspect of the strategy is when and how to communicate to the media. The tool must fit the message, and the venue must be appropriate for the governor and those involved with the issue or project. To communicate the governor's agenda on the local, state, and national levels, accurate media lists must be developed and maintained. Media lists should be targeted by audience, type of media, topic or topics covered, and specific interests. Identifying the various media options available to the governor is a key step to effectively using these tools to reach the intended audience.

## **Interviews**

The number of interviews the governor grants will depend, in part, on the size of the state and the number of reporters. It also will depend on the nature of the governor's communications strategy. In a few states, governors try to give interviews to anyone who requests one. This is less workable in large states. Most states try to grant gubernatorial interviews only if the questions cannot be addressed through a news conference or a staff member. If the governor is comfortable with this format, he or she also can sit down with a group of targeted reporters to discuss a specific topic. Strict ground rules should be agreed to by all parties in advance, however, and the press secretary should be alert and ready to intercede if the topic strays.

## **News Conferences**

State practices on news conferences vary considerably. Some governors have regularly

scheduled news conferences. In other states, news conferences are held sporadically. The frequency also may vary; for example, it may increase when the legislature is in session. News conferences can be a successful vehicle because they demonstrate that the governor is accessible, provide a way to highlight important issues, and may prevent any single issue from overriding other equally important issues. News conferences offer the governor a chance to present new, timely information to the media about various initiatives, answer questions directly, and be seen as an innovator and thinker. They are designed to take the governor's message to the media. However, news conferences are time-consuming and, occasionally, there is not much news to discuss. In addition, they can inadvertently raise sensitive issues in a public forum.

The most important rule for the news conference is to be certain there is news. Reporters do not appreciate wasting time at an event when other, more newsworthy stories are competing for their attention. Before scheduling a news conference, it is useful to find out what else is occurring in the state. Many important news conferences have failed because they were scheduled at the same time as a less important but more visual event.

When selecting a site for a news conference, it is important to:

- Choose a site that will make the governor look good, especially if it has an extra visual element. For example, if the governor is announcing a farm aid program, a devastated farm may be an appropriate backdrop. If the announcement concerns school aid, a school library or computer lab may be the right setting;
- Choose a site that is accessible to the media; and
- Choose a site that can meet the technical requirements of the media. If the site is remote, advise the broadcast reporters to bring their own power supply.

Visual aids, if appropriate, can be particularly effective. A compelling chart or figure can convey a

powerful message, and it gives television photographers an extra element with which to work.

It is also important to make sure media have advance knowledge of news conferences. Media advisories are short announcements indicating time, place, speakers, and topic. The daybook, the wire service calendar, and telephone calls to reporters are other ways to communicate information about a news conference.

By the time most governors have been elected, they are veterans of the news conference. It is important to clarify the procedures the governor wants to establish for the event.

- Does the governor want to be introduced by the press secretary?
- Will the press secretary step in to end the conference at the appropriate time?
- Does the governor want to make brief prepared remarks or to speak impromptu?

It is also important to summarize the essence of the conference in a 30-second message that can make the governor's point on the evening news. If the governor does not "edit" the remarks, the media will do it, perhaps losing the message in the process.

## News Releases

News releases can provide details on new programs or initiatives, summarize the results of legislation proposed by the governor, or provide information about an event. As a rule, a news release should contain news and include specific information about the use of the news release, including:

- The names and telephone numbers or e-mail addresses of contacts who can offer more information about the topic;
- A concise headline indicating what the story is about; and
- Guidance on when the story can be used.

The release date and time should be prominent. Sometimes news releases are issued in advance of an event under an embargo agreement, but reporters

cannot go public with the information until a specific date and time. It is essential to make the terms of an embargo clear to reporters if they are receiving advance information or copies of materials.

## Press Briefings

Another useful tool is the press briefing. Press briefings can be on-the-record sessions—or, occasionally, off the-record or background sessions—that provide a broader perspective or more information on complex issues. They give the governor an opportunity to meet with reporters in a more informal setting and promote two-way interaction. These sessions are valuable when organized for selected reporters, especially on important and complex issues. The press secretary or other spokesperson can also use press briefings to provide background information to reporters.

## Speeches

One communication tool always in abundant supply for governors is the speaking engagement. Governors are among the state's most sought-after speakers, and they can use these occasions to advance policies and goals, explain positions, and draw attention to their priority programs and issues. Speeches are one of the governor's most valuable tools for building consensus and support for programs and policies. To increase media coverage of a speech, it is helpful to provide copies of the text to reporters and send copies to those who might be interested in the topic but cannot attend. It also is important to include a short section introducing the speech that summarizes the essence of the message. This summary helps focus the reporter's attention on the information the governor believes is most important. It also is likely to be picked up as a news spot on radio and television shows. Brevity is the key in preparing the summary.

## Radio Actualities

Radio can be a powerful medium for communicating the governor's message. One way to increase the chances of radio air time is to produce actualities—audio recordings of the governor speaking on a newsworthy topic. Producing an actuality is simple, as long as the right equipment is available. The press secretary may tape the governor delivering a speech

or ask the governor questions as a reporter would. It is important to encourage the governor to articulate the message succinctly. After the governor records a sound bite, the press secretary can distribute it in several ways or post it online for media to download.

Some governors' offices produce radio actualities regularly—either daily or at a scheduled time each week. This enables the press secretary to maintain an accurate count of the stations using the actualities. He or she can then follow up with the relevant reporters to pitch the governor's message personally and provide them with additional information as needed. Actualities containing current information and sound bites can be provided to reporters on the governor's website or through a designated telephone line that can be accessed at their convenience.

### **Television Satellite Opportunities**

Providing television news stations with video of the governor is an extremely valuable tool. It usually involves hiring a videographer to tape a news conference or special event and purchasing satellite time to transmit the conference or event via satellite feed. This option is relatively inexpensive and enables the press secretary to edit the video feed so it best reflects the kind of story the governor would like to tell. The stations receiving this kind of feed use segments of the transmission in their news broadcasts.

A governor's communications office may decide to offer a satellite news conference to stations, either live or live-to-tape. This process involves finding a suitable television studio that has the capacity to transmit live pictures and sound and gives television reporters the opportunity to ask questions over the telephone while taping the governor responding to the questions live in a studio. Television stations may record and edit the tape for a newscast or they may feed it live and incorporate it into their regular broadcasts. This option generally costs more than an edited five-minute satellite feed because it requires purchasing more satellite time. If stations take the interview live, however, it is often a larger part of their newscast and the governor has more time to talk about an important issue. If the subject warrants,

television stations also may be willing to pay for the satellite time.

Creating video is a valuable tool because it can also be repurposed on the governor's website and social media sites.

### **Web-based Communications**

The Internet provides unlimited possibilities for a governor's communications office. It provides enormous outreach potential given the capability to quickly transmit information. Because of its immediacy, it is critical that all material presented on the Internet be treated as dynamic rather than static content and updated often.

A well-designed and -maintained website can be an asset to any gubernatorial office. The website is a widely-used resource for journalists and constituents to quickly access information about the governor's efforts leading the state. Websites provide access to governors' photos, biographies, speeches, press releases, policy positions and much more. It can also provide links to other websites that provide valuable information such as state and federal agency websites.

However, constantly evolving web-based technology is also presenting challenges for communications offices. The web is a form of two-way communication. This often results in more media requests for communications offices. It is important for the communications staff to work with the governor and other key staff to determine the office's strategy for web outreach and policies for participating in blogs and social media.

### **Social Media**

Because of the growing popularity of social media, many governors are using these channels for mass communication. Governors are using new media to host statewide town halls via webcast, chat with students in classrooms, reach new audiences through Facebook, give short updates through Twitter and post videos and photos from events to YouTube and Instagram. All of these mechanisms provide the governor with many forums with which to answer

questions or deliver an important address to constituencies in real time.

- **Building a Base.** Social media channels make it easier for governors to become accessible to the public. While building their base of followers, governors can become part of a bigger social media community that includes reporters, policymakers, concerned citizens and even fellow governors. Promoting on several social media accounts can be the best way to spread a message quickly and reach the most number of followers. Specifically, on Twitter, a great way to organize followers to better monitor them is to create lists. For example, the NGA Twitter account has created a list that specifically groups together all governors. This helps us keep better keep track of what issues governors are discussing and tackling.
- **Researching Social Media Channels.** It is important to remember that each social media channel can serve different purposes. Governors can track which account seems to work best with pictures, videos, policy-related posts, etc. and with that information, make the best decision on whether to post certain type of content in a specific platform, or maybe even all. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Periscope, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc. each have their own advantages and disadvantages when it comes to content.

Some governors may find that light-hearted posts, such as pictures of the governor traveling around the state—pictures that show the governor out and about—work best for Instagram. In other instances, Twitter has proven to work best when it comes to posts about governor's policies, bill signings, etc. While some governors' offices believe that Facebook requires a lot more maintenance, monitoring, effort and time to curate content, Facebook can be extremely useful when sharing photo albums, and even news articles.

With social media, it isn't just about the content being posted, it is also about the time at which it's posted. It is important to learn of the most ideal times for posting for each account. On Facebook, mid-afternoon might be the best time for posting, but Twitter may garner more response in the morning. Using free analytics tool like Hashtracking, Keyhole or TweetReach on past posts to learn what works best can lead to increased engagement and farther-reaching posts.

- **Creating Posts.** The biggest purpose of social media for governors is to disseminate information to the public. In order to increase a post's reach, it is key to follow some basic rules such as tagging parties involved and being succinct; however, there are other factors that help boosts posts. According to Twitter,1 videos and quotes can increase a tweet's number of retweets by 14 percent, links can increase retweets by 16 percent and hashtags by 30 percent. Most important, photos and graphics increase retweets by 62 percent. That number is significant; posts should rarely be posted without either of these factors, especially graphics. Sometimes, photos may be more appropriate for Facebook or Instagram; however, a graphic with data can be critical in boosting visibility on Twitter. For governors, graphics can be a great way to explain complex issues, and photos can be a great way to tell a story of their day- to-day experiences and interactions with citizens.

Creating a specific hashtag and curating a hashtag campaign can also be extremely beneficial in promoting certain events. A hashtag gives users an opportunity to better track and monitor engagement; through hashtags governors' offices are able to look at analytics for tweets, retweets, reach, exposure and even the most influential users of the hashtag. A great way to create a successful hashtag campaign is to come up with a hashtag that is unique, short, to the point and active. Researching and brainstorming are essential

when creating a hashtag for an event; always keep in mind whether your hashtag has already been used by another organization or user, whether it's too long for Twitter and whether it truly reflects what you are trying to promote. Hashtags can be crucial branding tools, so it is important to "make the hashtag your own".

- **Promoting Live Events.** Governors can reach audiences who cannot attend a particular event through livestreaming. The two most popular ways to livestream are Facebook Live and Periscope. For some events, it can be more appropriate to have raw live footage rather than edited video, especially when transparency or timeliness are priorities. Facebook Live might seem like the simplest option for sharing of events, since all that is needed is a Facebook account, which most governors already have. However, some governors' offices prefer to use Periscope because of different features. For example, constituents who subscribe to the governor's Periscope account will be notified whenever the governors are live. This is cross-beneficial because not only constituents, but also the media and governor's own staff are able to watch these videos in real time.
- **Engaging With the Audience.** Social media channels can create a form of two-way communication between governors and the public. These platforms can give governors a unique opportunity to communicate with constituents, members of the press and other audiences. Selecting which comments and concerns will best garner the desired response may seem daunting, but it also gives governors' offices a chance to engage in new ways. Through social media the public is able to voice opinions, and it is key for governors' offices to respond to those concerns in the best way possible, by replying directly or flagging concerns and connecting them with constituent services staff.
- **Opinion Pieces or Columns:** Many governors submit op-eds, columns and letters

to the editor to state and local, and occasionally national, media outlets. These opinion pieces can be powerful media tools as they fit into a communications strategy between earned media and paid advertising. They may write a regular weekly column or take the process a step further and do a news roundup of the week's events, which smaller papers can use as they deem appropriate. Columns can be about a special holiday or the governor's legislative program. Other opinion pieces like op-eds and letters to the editor often address more specific issues. Like video, these can be posted on the governor's website or social media sites.

- **Talk Shows:** Both radio and cable talk shows offer opportunities for media exposure. Although the audience for these shows may vary and be unpredictable, they should still be considered tools in the governor's communications strategy. The value of talk shows is in their spontaneity; they enable governors to hear from constituents with real concerns, thoughts, and ideas, rather than reacting to constructed questions from reporters. Because of the spontaneity of talk shows, however, the communications office should set certain parameters with each show's producer and host before the governor agrees to appear. Designating one or two topics for discussion makes the best use of the governor's time and affords the governor and the host an opportunity to research the topics before the show.
- **Direct Mail or E-mail:** An increasingly important tool in public information is the direct mail or e-mail list. By carefully logging incoming mail by name, address, e-mail address, and topic through the constituent services program, the governor can compile highly targeted lists that pinpoint the concerns of individual constituents. These lists can be used to let constituents know about developments on issues in which they have expressed an interest. Targeted direct mail or e-mail can also be used to encourage public

support for components of the governor's legislative program.

- **Photo Opportunities:** Every governor has many opportunities for photographs. When the governor presents an award or a proclamation, the communications office can arrange to have a digital photo taken and e-mail it to the constituent's hometown newspaper. If a constituent meets the governor in the state capitol, a photo can be taken and sent to a state newspaper. Most small daily and weekly papers like to receive information and photos of residents, and this action can have a strong impact at a relatively low cost. It is important to identify the subjects in the photograph, include the correct spellings of all names, and provide details about the constituent's visit. Photos are also another tool that can be repurposed for the web and social media.

## ***Final Thoughts***

Regardless of the size of the operation, the governor's communications office can and should play an integral role in advancing the goals of the administration. An office that communicates information about the governor's programs and policies to the public and promotes the communication of information within the administration can increase awareness and support for the governor's agenda.

Governors' communications offices can take many different forms and have varying responsibilities, but the challenges and opportunities of this office are similar among states. The role of the communications staff is unique and rewarding given their significant responsibilities to best serve the needs of the governor, the administration, and the citizens of the state. The key to a successful communications office is to have the governor's support and confidence and develop a communications strategy that enables the governor's communications staff to serve as credible, timely, fair, and effective advocates for the administration.

### ***Endnotes***

*Twitter Government and Elections Team, The Twitter Government and Elections Handbook, (San Francisco: Twitter, Inc., 2014).*

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