

# THE FAST TRACK for POLICY CHANGE

HOW COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES PLAY AN ESSENTIAL ROLE

10 Elements of Success

||||| MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

FPO

 The  
California  
Endowment

health  
happens  
here 

Some issues seem to stay stuck in neutral or low gear for years, not prioritized by thought leaders, lawmakers and the public. Fortunately, we've got good news to share with progress on issues such as education, health and energy policy:

- Four bills revising the state Education Code to fix school discipline were signed into law by California's governor.
- The Department of Defense announced policy changes and the President of the United States vowed to "end the scourge" of military sexual assault.
- The Center for Disease Control (CDC) confirmed journalists' reports that cases of "valley fever" had risen to alarming levels and dedicated specific funding to research on a vaccine.
- "Health for All" legislation was introduced in the California state legislature that covered undocumented populations as part of the safety net.
- Five states revised their energy efficiency resource standards in a move towards the reduction of climate change pollution.

These are all examples of real policy outcomes for social issues that had, in the past, largely been overlooked by the public, thought leaders and lawmakers.

More importantly, these results were achieved in time frames that can be counted in months or years rather than decades. These issues went from zero to sixty miles per hour in record time. How did change happen? And how did it happen so quickly?

Simply put, it wouldn't have happened without the dedication of foundations that believe in the power of media and communications grantmaking and applied it in new and different ways. Innovative communications cannot alone accomplish successful social change. However, it can be the fuel that amplifies other strategies — maximizes the benefit of research investments, elevates advocacy and community organizing efforts, and creates urgency around an issue. A growing body of evidence indicates innovative communications doesn't create change, however, it helps accelerate change.

The boldest funders are willing to use their brands, their power and their political capital in support of the issues they believe in. At The California Endowment, we've witnessed the impacts of this first hand. We've seen how issues that have stagnated are suddenly shifted into high gear. And we know that this is just the tip of the iceberg — there are many foundations out there with initiatives and grantees employing innovative tools such as supporting new roles for journalists as educators, paid advertising, public opinion polling and creating new media products and outlets. Such efforts build the public awareness that emboldens thought leaders and lawmakers with the urgency to act, champion and legislate.



## Examples that inspire us.

At The California Endowment, we've started to collect case studies where grantmakers have fast forwarded beyond traditional thinking around building grantee communications capacity. These inspirational examples use media and communications grantmaking to create a more receptive environment for dialogue about potential solutions and build public and political will for policy change.

### The Invisible War

How a disenfranchised population was given a voice through documentary film and how pre-release engagement with policy makers led to proactive policy change by the military.

### Health for All Campaign

How a foundation-branded ad campaign gave stakeholders permission to talk about preserving the healthcare safety net for undocumented residents and sparked legislation.

### Fix School Discipline Campaign

How the voices of local young people were elevated and amplified through strategic media relations activities and advertising and created legislative traction at the state level.

### Reporting on Health Collaborative

How a community media collaborative pooled their skills to deliver a series of articles on "valley fever" that engaged champions and garnered national attention of the CDC.

### RE-AMP

How an online media start-up became an effective awareness-building outlet and contributed to the establishment of energy efficiency resource standards in five states.

Case studies of these and other success stories can be found at:

[MedialImpactFunders.org/fasttrack](https://www.MedialImpactFunders.org/fasttrack)

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10 Elements of Success

These and other examples have taught us that even when successful the efforts can be messy – with unexpected detours and road blocks. However, we can begin to make a few observations about some common principles:



**1 SOLUTIONS**  
The majority of these initiatives contained messages not just about the problem, but about a range of potential solutions. The net effect is to give the public hope and give policy makers a call to action. This approach also speaks directly to the nexus of the nature of the Internet and journalism: to both ask questions and answer them.



**2 POLICY MAKERS**  
Identifying policy makers explicitly as a target audience and devoting appropriate resources to outreach is key. Whenever possible, explicitly making it a bi-partisan effort can be very effective.



**3 AGILITY**  
While a communications strategy is important, so is building in flexibility. The ability to respond quickly with resources to a changing landscape is critical to overcoming unforeseen challenges and leveraging unexpected opportunities. Often these initiatives can be a bit messy mid-stream; flexibility and agility makes navigation easier.



**4 REPETITION**  
The continuity of coverage that comes from a journalistic series on a topic or a paid advertising campaign results in a multiplier effect on awareness building and keeps the issue top-of-mind during delays in the legislative process.



**5 HUMANITY**  
Engaging community voices can be a powerful way to give an issue a human face. It can also support journalistic efforts, assist with multi-media content, engage the constituents of lawmakers and provide testimonials for solutions.



**6 PAID ADVERTISING**  
Having the ability to control the content and timing of messages through paid advertising can create awareness during key milestones. The ability to customize messages geographically or by target audience can also accelerate the speed of social change.



**7 FOUNDATION BRANDING**  
Putting a foundation’s name and “brand” on media or communications efforts can lend credibility and gravitas to an issue, especially in smaller markets or rural areas. Stakeholders are more likely to take another look at an issue if it has become the priority of a philanthropic institution.



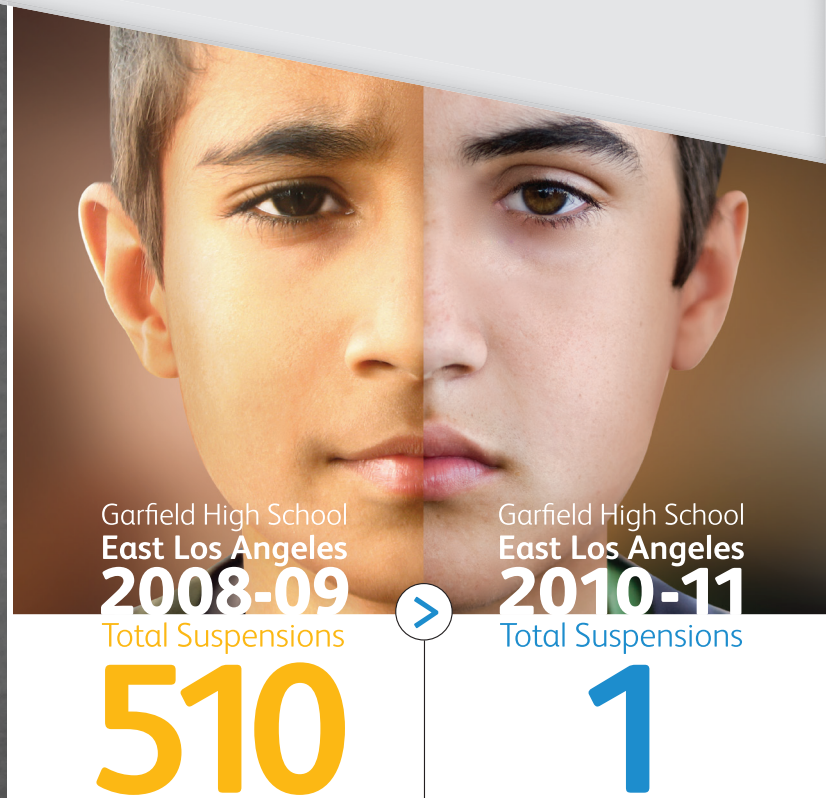
**8 MEDIA START-UPS**  
Establishing digital outlets where in-depth coverage about an issue can be a cost-effective and efficient way of designating a “space” for the issue to live in. At their best, these sites also become media tools for expanded and sustained coverage over time.



**9 PARTNER. PARTNER. PARTNER.**  
Whether it is funder partnerships or media partnerships, collaborative and in-kind efforts result in impact that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.



**10 INTEGRATION FROM THE OUTSET**  
The combination of media, community and policy-maker engagement from the beginning of a strategic communications effort is key to success. The catalytic effect of coordinating integrating these two strategies far outweighs either one as a siloed or solo effort.



## Media funding is about creating the next generation of media partnerships.

Many of the case studies we explore have a journalism component to them. That's because we've come to understand philanthropists share common ground with journalists: a desire for impact. High-quality media coverage about the issues we care about can fuel public dialogue, give political champions the "air cover" they need to take a stand on issues, and generate the political will for everything from agenda setting to drafting model legislation.

**MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS**

**Hershey Cause**  
Communications for Good®

## Join the conversation.

The dialogue around innovative media and communications grantmaking is just beginning, but it promises to be an exciting one. Learn more about how you can use innovative communications strategies to drive social change into high gear. We invite you to share your experiences and best practices, join the learning network to hear more about the work of your peers or provide collaborative support for the work that is currently making a difference in issues like healthcare, education, juvenile justice and poverty reduction.

Visit [MediaImpactFunders.org/fasttrack](http://MediaImpactFunders.org/fasttrack) for more information on these case studies and to sign up for learning opportunities.