

# Strategic Communication Campaign Fundamentals

## 2



### THINK AHEAD

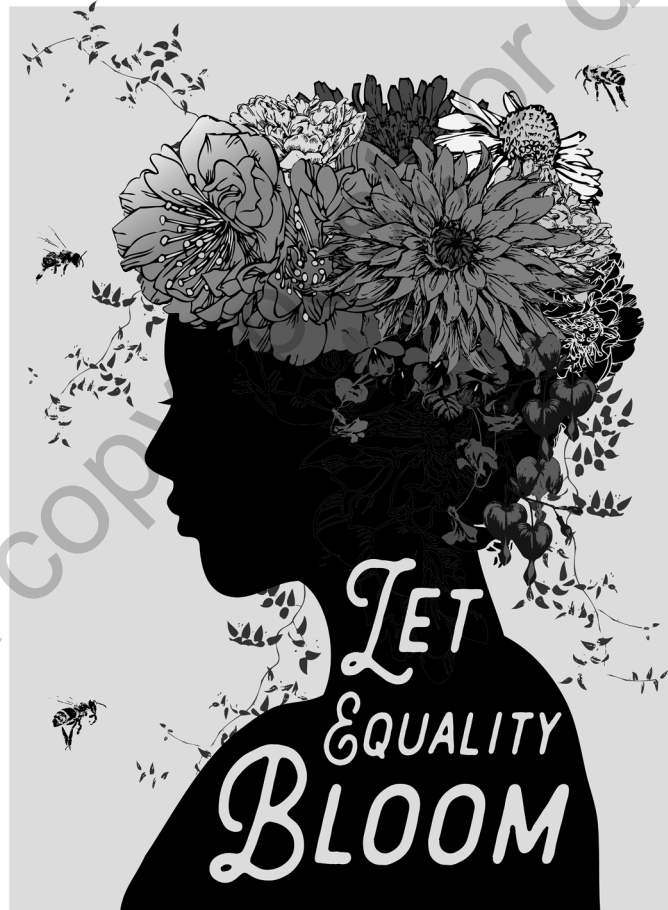
- 2.1 Understand why public relations practitioners plan and make connections between campaign development and organizational goals.
- 2.2 Explain the importance of each step in the planning process beginning with research and ending with reporting.
- 2.3 Recognize how the elements of an integrated and strategic plan come together by examining tangible results.

The *We the People* campaign aimed to restore hope, imagination, curiosity, and creativity into the conversations happening across the US. This piece of art titled “Greater than Fear” was created by Adhami and Shepard Fairey in response to the Trump administration’s Muslim ban.

In 2017, Aaron Huey, National Geographic photographer and Stanford Media Designer, launched a Kickstarter campaign with one goal in mind—to counter “hate, fear, and open racism that were normalized during the 2016 presidential campaign.”<sup>1</sup> Amplifier Art, built upon free and open source images, describes itself as an organization that turns artists into activists and observers into participants. By galvanizing like-minded people this organization promotes messages of hope. It has sponsored visually stunning integrated campaigns to raise awareness of a wide variety of issues,

such a voting rights, climate change, and criminal justice reform. The goal of the organization according to Huey, “is to reclaim and rebuild an American identity rooted in equality, dignity, diversity, truth, and beauty. At Amplifier, we believe that each piece of art we create and distribute with our partners can be a compass that leads us away from the chaos and negativity of this polarizing time.”<sup>2</sup>

Since its inception, the organization has grown tremendously as it has developed campaigns with stakeholders front and center. In just a few short years and with a dedicated group of 18 artists, the organization has impacted more than 20,000 educators nationwide. Even receiving support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Discovery Center.<sup>3</sup> Its first campaign titled *We the People* disseminated 46,535 posters, 9,788 free graphic downloads, distributed 79,260 stickers, and amassed 201,233 shares and impressions via



Hear Our Voice by Brooke Fischer is one of many pieces of art found on the Amplifier website.

social media channels.<sup>4</sup> Since then they have launched the following socially driven campaigns, *Women's March on Washington*, *Power to the Polls*, *March for Our Lives*, *#MyClimateHero*, *Voting Rights*, *Unbroken by Bars*, *The Truth Is Prisons Are...*, *Honor the Treaties*, *Close Rikers*, and a special call for art during the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The organization has accrued support from people across the **social sphere**, the broad network of interactive digital and social media channels that collectively create a new form of public sphere. Between downloads, photographs, tweets, Instagram posts, Facebook follows, check-ins, and likes, blog articles, and news coverage, the organization is thriving. Its success and its tools are multimedia, multimodal: This is integrated communication today.

Public relations campaigns come in an almost infinite variety of forms and combinations. They utilize channels from social media and digital advertising to media relations and public events. They combine words, images, audio, and video in a multitude of audience-centered formats to convey their messages. They incorporate cutting-edge research to develop strategies and tactics, continuously improve content, and evaluate impact. They continue to strive for more inclusive language and imagery reflective of the diverse organizations they represent and the societies where they exist. Yet, in all of their complexity, campaigns begin with a simple purpose: To help solve a problem.

As PR practitioners, we are professional communicators developing and orchestrating these campaigns. Management relies upon this role to be better than most at communicating an organization's messaging. All too often, PR practitioners are pigeonholed into being labeled media liaisons or relationship managers; however, this role is more than that; PR practitioners are strategic marketing counselors. In order to successfully execute strategic integrated campaigns, we must be able to see the big picture and the minute details. It is impossible for organizations to disconnect from the world around them and to operate in a vacuum.

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## WHY WE PLAN

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The foundation of a well-developed PR plan is an effective approach devised from a robust communication blueprint. Using a strategic approach has everything to do with identifying key stakeholder outcomes, targeting the right audience, formulating the most impactful objectives and message, and incorporating the most effective tactics to accomplish the necessary goals. A plan is an avenue that is used to propose and obtain approvals, as well as a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating a product that distinguishes true PR professionals.<sup>6</sup>

The goal of strategic PR is to contribute to the overarching mission of an organization by supporting its defined goals. In order for the strategies to be successful, it is imperative that PR practitioners obtain accurate information about the challenges at hand, the publics with which they communicate, the effectiveness of each communication initiative, and the relational impacts that each program has with critical stakeholders.

## PRo Tip

### THE CASE FOR LISTENING FIRST

To ensure effective communication, PR depends upon the need to listen. Stakeholders including employees, clients, and diverse audiences help inform integrated campaigns. According to researcher Katie Place, “When listening occurs, clients and agency consider themselves as partners in achieving shared goals.”<sup>7</sup>

*Source:* Katie Place, “Listening as the Driver of Public Relations Practice and Communications Strategy Within a Global Public Relations Agency,” *Public Relations Journal* 12, no. 3 (May 2019): 1-18, accessed May 2019, [https://prjournal.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/katieplace\\_listening.pdf](https://prjournal.instituteforpr.org/wp-content/uploads/katieplace_listening.pdf).

The strongest and most strategic campaigns are informed by what customers, prospects, and stakeholders are sharing and posting in the public and social spheres, so listen to what they are saying or, for that matter, not saying. Listening is one of the most important but underused tools of the PR practitioner.<sup>8</sup> Shayna Englin, founder and CEO of 42 Comms and graduate instructor in strategic communication at Georgetown University and George Washington University, notes that **strategic communication** “means communicating the best message, through the right channels, measured against well-considered organizational and communications-specific goals.”<sup>9</sup> Understanding the specific executable tasks and their impacts can ensure that programs are delivered more effectively and highlights the value that the PR function brings to the organization.

One approach to planning is a process called **management by objectives**, commonly referred to as **MBO**. Organizations have missions and goals, which can be broken down into measurable objectives. Responsibility for execution and completion of goals is held by different parts of the organization. PR professionals often use communication objectives to provide focus and define direction when formulating a strategy targeting or supporting specific organizational objectives.<sup>10</sup> Norman Nager and T. Harrell Allen outline several steps of MBO that assist practitioners in building a plan that includes examining client and employer objectives; audience analysis; media channels; primary and secondary sources; communication strategies; message sentiment; and visually appealing artifacts such as photos, infographics, artwork, or videos.<sup>11</sup> These steps can be used to form a checklist to spur PR practitioners in formulating a comprehensive plan and a sound foundation for strategic development.

As presented in the introduction, a simplified approach to planning is typically composed of four steps. First, practitioners use **research** to define the problem or situation; then they develop objectives and strategies that address the situation; once complete, they implement the strategies; and finally measure the results of the PR efforts. John Marston’s **R.A.C.E.**<sup>12</sup> model (Research, Action planning,

Communication, Evaluation) or Jerry Hendrix's **R.O.P.E.**<sup>13</sup> model (Research, Objectives, Programming, Evaluation) are commonly used to describe the process.

Both planning models begin with research and end with evaluation. The four steps encompass the following:

1. Conduct research to analyze the situation facing the organization and to accurately define the problem or opportunity in such a way that the PR efforts can successfully address the cause of the issue and not just its symptoms.
2. Develop a strategic action plan that addresses the issue that was assessed in the first step. This includes having an overall goal, measurable objectives, clearly identified publics, targeted strategies, and effective tactics.
3. Execute the plan with communication tools and tasks that contribute to reaching the overarching objectives.
4. Measure whether the campaign was successful in meeting the goals using a variety of evaluation tools.

All planning models have varying strengths and weaknesses. In this book, we expand our focus on the planning stage using the ROSTIR model to emphasize the importance of understanding and diagnosing the problem, challenge, or opportunity at hand; setting communication goals and objectives; and building strategies and tactics from them.

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## ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGIC PLAN

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It may seem proper to begin the process of planning with tactics including brochures, press releases, an event, or even a blog post; however, an appropriate plan should precede the selection of tactics. By first conducting research, practitioners are able to define the overall goals, objectives, and strategies of the plan, otherwise efforts may be wasted from the outset. Some practitioners create a brief outline, while others develop an expansive document that includes a substantial amount of detail. Another model for the planning process, the ROSTIR strategic planning model, includes six key elements, all of which will be expanded upon in upcoming chapters. The following is a brief summary of each element:

- Research: diagnosis/goal setting
- Objectives
- Strategies
- Tactics
- Implementation
- Reporting/evaluation



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Secondary and primary research, diagnosing the organizational problem or opportunity, and setting communication-specific goals are critical first steps to a successful campaign.

## Research, Diagnosis, and Goal Setting

The term **diagnose** means to ascertain the cause or nature of something, usually an issue or problem that must be solved.<sup>14</sup> In this initial stage of planning, practitioners ask themselves the following question: Why is a PR plan necessary? There are many situations that prompt the need for strategic PR planning. Some include the following:

- overcoming a problem or negative situation;
- conducting a specific, one-time project supporting the launch of a new product or service;
- reinforcing an ongoing effort to preserve a reputation or public support;
- expanding your organization's outreach to a new audience;
- creating and reinforcing a brand and professional corporate image;
- mitigating the impact of negative publicity and/or corporate crisis; or
- establishing expertise among your peers, the press, or your potential clients or customers.

Once the decision to create the plan has been made, regardless of the rationale, the foundation for the overarching strategy has to be defined. Research accompanies this stage of development. Research is the methodical collection and explanation of information used to increase understanding of needs, audiences, channels, and communication baselines.<sup>15</sup> Strategic planning cannot work without intimate knowledge of the intended audience. Research is key to understanding the target audience and the needs of the plan. This initial developmental research provides practitioners with the insights to diagnose challenges and opportunities, before prioritizing and reframing them as communication goals.

### Diversity First

Incorporating the diversity-first approach should begin in this initial stage. We often see campaigns fail when **diversity** and **inclusion** (D&I) are not part of a campaign's initial research and planning. It has never been clearer that homogenous groups lack diversity of thought, opinions, and ideas. Implementing a true D&I first approach is more than ensuring messages or images represent a variety of backgrounds. It's about the people developing the campaign—ensuring they too are diverse—in more than merely race. Nysha King, a communications council member for Forbes, says that brands should strive for “promotional activities that reflect the society that they are a part of, and avoid offensive references to race, gender, sexual orientation or religion—thereby, increasing the chances that audiences respond to the call to action.”<sup>17</sup>

Forward-thinking brands are paving the way. For example, Tylenol's four-year **hashtag** driven campaign “#HowWeFamily” is a celebration of diverse families<sup>18</sup> while brands like Shutterfly and Snapfish regularly include images portraying an array of couple/family images illustrating variety of life celebrations through inclusive photos. Microsoft's “We All Win” 2019 Super Bowl commercial highlighted the Xbox Adaptive Controller for people with disabilities. The campaign centered on hassle-free gaming equipment which has an accessible, user-friendly controller.<sup>19</sup>

### PRo Tip

#### DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FIRST

“PR and marketing departments have the power to shape new approaches, while at the same time, demonstrate that their organizations are employers of choice and industry innovators.” Nysha King, Forbes<sup>16</sup>

*Source:* Nysha King, “Making the Case for Diversity in Marketing and PR,” Forbes (blog), entry posted February 15, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2019/02/15/making-the-case-for-diversity-in-marketing-and-pr/#4007d073424d>.

More than an item to check off a list, diversity and inclusion should be embedded in the campaign development process. Just as PR practitioners develop thorough objectives, they should also embed sound D&I principles into their campaigns. And that starts by having a diversity of individuals and experiences as part of an integrated PR team.

## Objectives

After research is conducted, a clear diagnosis is realized, and broad communication goals are set, the next step of the process is to establish appropriate **objectives** for the plan. Objectives must be measurable. At the end of the day, the C-suite executives place emphasis on the bottom line. Executive management is looking to see data, analysis, measurement, and how each relate back to PR efforts. Statistics and data are often necessary to show that efforts put forth by a PR department are contributing to the overarching goals of the company. Outcomes can evaluate whether or not a change in behavior or relationships is influenced by the PR strategy. Examples of high-quality outcomes might include an increase in the sale of a product or an uptick in donations due to an executed PR campaign. As organizational resources are precious and companies are becoming increasingly frugal, executives are often unwilling to spend money unless an outcome contributes to a business objective.<sup>20</sup>

Objectives should connect four key elements: the target audience or public, the specific outcome, the measurement or magnitude of the change required to reach this outcome, and the target date.<sup>21</sup> Campaign objectives should contain an impact factor, such as a knowledge outcome, a change of opinion, or a change of behavior.<sup>22</sup> Strategies and tactics should be designed to support the achievement of the objective.

- **Example:** Focused on bottom line metrics, objectives are outcomes that can be quantified. Armed with \$2.75 million in grant funding, the Texas Council on Family Violence launched two public awareness campaigns, “There is Help, There is Hope” and “Family and Friends.” The goals for both campaigns were measurable.<sup>23</sup>
  - **Objective:** Achieve 20 percent increase in Texas-based calls to the national family violence hotline during paid media flights.
  - **Strategy:** Connect with families directly by creating an informational brochure to increase awareness for the program.
  - **Tactic:** Distribute 1 million educational campaign brochures over the duration of the campaign.

It can be difficult to measure how well a particular informational objective has been achieved. Objectives should have clear metrics that can be tracked and quantified. The PR practitioner, along with management, must set the objectives together. As noted



earlier, objectives must be realistic, achievable, and measurable in order to illustrate success. To simply state “increase awareness by 25 percent” is not enough. A solid baseline is needed to indicate whether or not the target audience increased awareness by 25 percent. Therefore, developmental research must provide an initial baseline (e.g., initial awareness may be at 40 percent among the public in question, therefore 65 percent would be the target). Measurement before, during, and after the campaign is critical to understand whether the objective has been achieved.

## Strategies

**Strategies** are the choices made to select specific channels and approaches, focusing efforts toward achieving the objectives. For each objective, there may be a single overall strategy, or there may be multiple strategies depending on the PR plan. Some strategies may also support multiple objectives. In many campaigns, this means building a combination of paid, earned, shared, owned, and converged channels that are most appropriate for the campaign’s purpose and its publics.

## Tactics

**Tactics** are the tangible aspects of the strategy. There are various methods to reach a target audience, such as face-to-face interactions and media outreach through paid, earned, shared, and owned channels. Face-to-face tactics might include special events such as annual meetings, open houses, grand openings, recognition events, group meetings, town halls, round tables, and meetups. Owned media tactics are comprised of any material that is managed and owned by the company, such as a company blog, annual report, blogs, case studies, books, infographics, mobile apps, logos, letters, brochures, websites, podcasts, webinars, videos, photographs, and newsletters. Earned media is one of the most powerful vehicles for getting messages out to the masses. Earned media refers to publicity gained through promotional efforts rather than publicity gained through paid messaging like in advertising. When a practitioner’s pitch to a journalist or blogger results in some type of media placement, this is considered earned media. Social and digital media channels with opportunities for interactivity constitute the space for shared media. Mediated and nonmediated approaches should work together to create effective campaigns.

Let us examine the combination of a strategy and tactic collectively at work. Consumers often prefer products that are all natural, healthier options to those that may be less environmentally friendly or less wholesome. Coffee creamer is probably not the first product that jumps to mind when considering natural, healthy, and organic options. As a way to differentiate themselves from the competition, Nestlé Coffee-mate set out to change opinions with its line of all-natural coffee creamers, Natural Bliss. Its strategy was developed to turn heads and garner attention. Nestlé Coffee-mate surprised consumers with an all-natural coffee experience where they least expected it—at their local coffee shop. Nestlé Coffee-mate staffed a New York City

## PRo Tip

### KEEP TACTICS TOP OF MIND

Review tactics regularly. While an organization's mission and goals should be relatively stable over time, and many components of a PR plan can be considered fixed elements, tactics require constant review. Unexpected external

developments, a change in the business atmosphere, emerging media channels, or the actions of competitors can require a fresh perspective and second look.

coffee shop, temporarily renaming the establishment “Natural Bliss Café.” Actors who looked the part of baristas, wearing little more than body paint, served coffee with Natural Bliss creamer. This strategy was successful in large part because the target audience, millennials, were not only shocked but also had the opportunity to sample free coffee and Natural Bliss.

The strategy can be considered as the idea (a direct consumer experience of the product in a surprising setting), and the tactic is the method through which that idea is carried out (the uniquely revealing pop-up coffee shop, actors, and free products to sample). In the above example, the intent behind the strategy was to introduce the shock factor to the targeted audience, and the tactic was the unexpected pop-up coffee



©Nestlé

Nestlé emphasized the *natural* in its Natural Bliss Café coffee shop takeover.

shop managed by scantily clad, painted baristas. This strategy also relies in part on shared social media and traditional earned media to spread the story, ensuring coverage and awareness beyond those who entered the shop itself. In this way, smart strategies and tactics can impact multiple audiences through multiple channels.

## Implementation

Determining the right timing to implement a campaign and identifying who is responsible for executing the campaign is the next step in the planning process. Factors such as the complexity, duration, steps, and intricacy of the campaign play a key role during the **implementation** phase, the point in the campaign process where the campaign plan is put into operation. A calendar or timeline should be developed to help guide practitioners through the implementation process. Some campaigns may only last a month while others may be staggered over several months or longer. Appropriate timing of the campaign, scheduling of the correct sequence of tactics, and building a calendar can help contribute to the development of a seamless implementation schedule and workflow.<sup>24</sup>

## Reporting/Evaluation

The process of reporting and **evaluation** relates the results of the campaign directly back to the stated objectives. Evaluation includes the analysis of completed or ongoing activities that determine or support a PR campaign. PR practitioners must put measures in place to track the results of each PR campaign, then contextualize and communicate those results to key stakeholders. Reporting and evaluation should not only take place at the end of a campaign. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Savvy practitioners continually evaluate the metrics throughout the process. In doing so, a practitioner will know whether or not the stated objectives, strategies, and tactics are resonating with the intended audiences. It is appropriate to measure objectives at multiple points during the implementation phase through the conclusion of the PR campaign. If strategies and tactics are not working as expected, this process provides the opportunity to revise them before the end of the campaign. Experienced practitioners know that flexibility is a key part of successful campaigns.

As previously noted, objectives must be measurable; therefore, it is vital to understand the appropriate metrics that will be used in order to properly evaluate if the objectives have been achieved. Reporting should reiterate the specific objectives and how each was measured. Informational objectives might include metrics such as surveys of awareness among key publics, media content analysis, number of fliers distributed, or number of hits to a website. Motivational objectives, on the other hand, are more easily evaluated using metrics evaluating the number of attendees at a specific event, direct increase in sales, or surveys that benchmark consumer's beliefs before and after using a product.

## Budget

When evaluating the previous steps, it is important to not forget about the all-important **budget** that has been reserved for the campaign. At the initiation of any project, the PR manager should sit with both the internal and external teams to establish the program costs and expectations. Budgets are generally divided into two basic categories: staff time and out-of-pocket expenses (also known as OOP expenses).

Staff expenses include the time required by the practitioners to create and execute the plan. This varies widely, but can often account for 70 percent or more of the overall budget.<sup>25</sup> Media kits, collateral material, website development, video production, transportation, staging, and even media costs such as radio advertising or paid social media are some examples of OOP expenditures.

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## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

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This chapter began by highlighting one of the most unique grassroots social movements of the past decade—the launch of Amplifier Art. At the time its origin, founder Aaron Huey launched a **crowdfunding** campaign hoping to raise a mere \$60,000 by attracting 10,000 backers. Crowdfunding is the practice of funding a project or venture by raising small donations from a large number of people, typically through digital channels. By the end of the campaign the organization accrued 22,840 supporters and raised \$1,365,105.00.<sup>26</sup>

Of all of the organization's social media platforms, it's no surprise that Instagram boasts the most with 54,000 followers and an average of 400 comments per post. According to analysis from Similar Web 100 percent of the organization's traffic is organic.<sup>27</sup> Nearly unheard of in today's paid media market. This indicates a strong brand affinity and a keen understanding of the organization's audience.

**100.00% Organic**  
Top 5 Organic keywords



**0% Paid**  
Top 5 Paid keywords

Further examination indicates that traffic to the organization's website is led by Facebook with 31.27 percent followed by Pinterest then Instagram and finally Reddit.

In this example, Huey solicited support from everyday citizens using powerful imagery along with a strong foundation built upon community allies such as the Women's March and an understanding of the overarching issue, seizing the opportunity, setting realistic goals and objectives, and forming strategies that aligned with tactics that were easily implemented.



For PR practitioners, this campaign represents a clear example and opportunity for identifying the objectives, strategies, and tactics behind the campaign. Taking a closer look, in the simplest form, the *objective* of this campaign was to raise awareness surrounding the polarization of America the Trump campaign initiated; the *strategy* was to formulate a far-reaching, widespread, earned and owned media outreach approach; and the *tactic* was to allow for the downloading of free art images to be used in classrooms, at marches, and within the community at large.

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## CONCLUSION

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Planning is critical to effective campaigns. There are many approaches to strategic planning, but the most useful follow the practices of MBO: setting clearly defined targets and building out a plan of action to implement them. This allows for work to be broken down into digestible pieces and to empower every individual involved with the responsibility for their piece of the larger plan. The ROSTIR model is one approach particularly well suited to PR campaign planning in that it emphasizes the research necessary throughout the process, as well as a clear separation of the objectives, strategies, and tactics that provide a playbook for implementation, while the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel helps practitioners center on all areas of DEI to create meaningful, genuine, and impactful campaigns that represent today's America.

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## THINK CRITICALLY

1. What are the differences between goals and objectives?
2. What qualities go into well-written objectives?
3. How do strategies and tactics relate? Identify the best way to distinguish the two by giving examples.
4. Why are measurable objectives important during the evaluation phase? What are some advantages and disadvantages to incorporating measurable objectives into a strategic campaign?
5. Consider how Aaron Huey's crowdfunding campaign helped to support a campaign

whose overarching message was hope. Do you think it was a well-designed campaign? Support your response with evidence found in the chapter and secondary research you find online while examining Amplifier Art.

Does the art found on the Amplifier webpage embody any spokes from the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel? If so, which ones? And how are the areas represented?

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## KEY TERMS

Budget 44	Inclusion 39	Social sphere 35
Crowdfunding 44	Management by objectives (MBO) 36	Strategic communication 36
Diagnose 38	Objectives 40	Strategies 41
Diversity 39	R.A.C.E. 36	Tactics 41
Evaluation 43	Research 36	
Hashtag 39	R.O.P.E. 37	
Implementation 42		

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## CONCEPT CASE: MISSION-DRIVEN PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY FLOW YOGA

The mission statement for Community Flow Yoga is as follows: *Community Flow Yoga believes that the lessons learned in a conscious yoga practice can be spread to enrich our communities and our world. We believe in inclusion, community, acceptance, equality, and harmony at the center of our teaching philosophy and in the way we run our business. Helping others, both in our teaching and through community outreach, is central to who we are. As a decentralized company, we understand that power should be shared among our studio leaders, instructors, members, and communities. As a privately held company, we have the autonomy and the freedom to live these values in the pursuit of long-term stability and sustainable growth.*

**Given this mission your task is to think about elements from each stage in the ROSTIR model that reflects this mission.**

- What research would need to be done to learn more about this organization and its publics?

- What communication goals could reflect these organizational aspirations?
- What measurable objectives could serve as specific, useful points of achievement and direction?
- What messages would best reflect the organization's needs?
- What communication strategies, tactics, and communication channels would be most effective for this organization?
- How could diversity and inclusion be conveyed in the organization's outreach?
- What ongoing and evaluative research should the organization perform on its communications, its publics, its industry, its competitors, and its communities?

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## CASE STUDY: [UNLABELED]™

*Coca-Cola with Anomaly LA*  
*Campaign Focus: Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity*

What happens when one of the world's largest and most recognizable brands tosses away its iconic logo and replaces its labeling with a simple silver can and a solid red stripe? Well, it turns out, quite a bit.

The Coca-Cola Company, partnering with the agency Anomaly LA, developed one of its most integrated, diverse, and multitiered PR campaigns ever: [unlabeled]™. In a world driven by labels, the company decided to strip its own label of all words to start a much-needed conversation surrounding the ill-effects of labeling others.

### Research/Diagnosis

Diet Coke, produced and distributed by the Coca-Cola Company, has been a supporter of LGBTQ+ rights for years. The company prides itself on fostering an atmosphere of diversity, inclusion, and equity. In fact, every year since 2006, Coca-Cola has received a perfect score of 100 on the Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) Corporate Equality Index.<sup>28</sup> The HRC, a nonprofit organization representing over 3 million members, is considered the largest national lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer civil rights organization nationwide.<sup>29</sup> The Corporate Equality Index is their benchmarking tool that tracks policies and procedures pertinent to LGBTQ+ employees.<sup>30</sup> What's more, a campaign such as this draws upon research indicating that younger generations, including millennials and Generation Z, are loyal to brands that support causes that are important to them. The Brands Taking Stands 2019 study, *Cause Is Working, Your Marketing Isn't* from DoSomething Strategic, reported that "66 percent of young consumers say that a brand's association with a social cause or platform positively impacts their overall impression of the brand and 58

percent say this association will impact their likelihood of purchasing that brand."<sup>31</sup>

Developing the [unlabeled]™ campaign was a natural part of the company's core values as well as the next in a series of initiatives deducted to its diversity and inclusion efforts. In 2015 the company sold logo-free cans in the Middle East near Ramadan to combat prejudice,<sup>32</sup> and created limited edition cans for Australia in 2017 supporting marriage equality.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, during the 2018 Superbowl, its ad touched upon the importance of gender fluidity.<sup>34</sup>

As part of the research efforts before the launch of the larger campaign, the PR and marketing practitioners at the Coca-Cola Company worked with their community partners including American Association of People with Disabilities, the American Indian College Fund, Ascend, Essence Communications, Human Rights Campaign, National Urban League, Hispanic Federation, Essence Communications, and GLAAD to garner insights and feedback surrounding the campaign.<sup>35</sup> According to Kerri Kopp, group director, Diet Coke, "Social media chatter around stereotypes and discrimination has increased almost five-fold over the last three years."<sup>36</sup> The premise behind the [unlabeled]™ campaign was simple: While not all labels are negative, most create an experience of feeling inadequate or "less than" as perceived within the boundaries of societal norms. The Diet Coke [unlabeled]™ website reads "some labels are earned. fought for. demanded. proudly owned. but then there are labels that are imposed upon us. weapons aimed to limit. box us in. make us feel lesser than. but imagine a world where we aren't limited by the way others label us."<sup>37</sup> By removing the label from their can, the hope was that the

move would spark a deeper conversation surrounding labels in this country. The initial campaign featured various people sharing their experiences of being labeled. The labels addressed in the campaign range from mental illness to physical abilities to sexual orientation. You can watch their stories on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/user/dietcoke/videos>. After watching some of the videos and looking at Diet Coke's social media pages on Instagram and Facebook, refer to the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel to see which areas of D&I were prioritized in this campaign.

### Objectives

Grounded in the Coca-Cola Company's core values of equity, this campaign furthered its support of diversity and inclusion initiatives. In a word, the campaign challenges stereotypes and hopes to empower individuality. The campaign's overall purpose was to start a national conversation surrounding the importance of removing barriers so that we can begin to value one another for who we are. The company pledged to use their resources, global reach, and relationships to create an open space for everyone to simply be themselves.<sup>38</sup> One could assert that core elements of brand awareness were a critical component of this campaign. Cans of any Coca-Cola product are quintessential examples of brand awareness. The classic red, the stripe down the side—recognizable in any medium. It would not be unrealistic to conclude that in this case the company wanted to be associated with equality, diversity, and inclusion at every level.

### Strategies

Using their own iconic cans as the centerpiece of this campaign, the Coca-Cola Company stripped themselves first of their own label to encourage others to discard theirs. This was a bold move for the brand. Packaging is the identity of a product. They took a risk in “unlabeling” themselves.

### Tactics

Using a multipronged approach, the Coca-Cola Company employed tactics across paid, earned, shared, and owned channels through the development of a microsite dedicated to the [unlabeled]<sup>TM</sup> campaign, videos, social media posts, and sponsored events during the summer of 2019.

#### Paid

At a Pride event in Los Angeles, the company distributed stickers with words including “Independent” and “Misrepresented” to drive home the labeling points. In addition, they purchased ads on social media channels that reinforced this messaging.

#### Earned

Coverage of the campaign was picked up by traditional media coverage and by outlets including Forbes, Essence, Adweek, Ad Age, and PR Daily among others.<sup>39</sup>

#### Shared

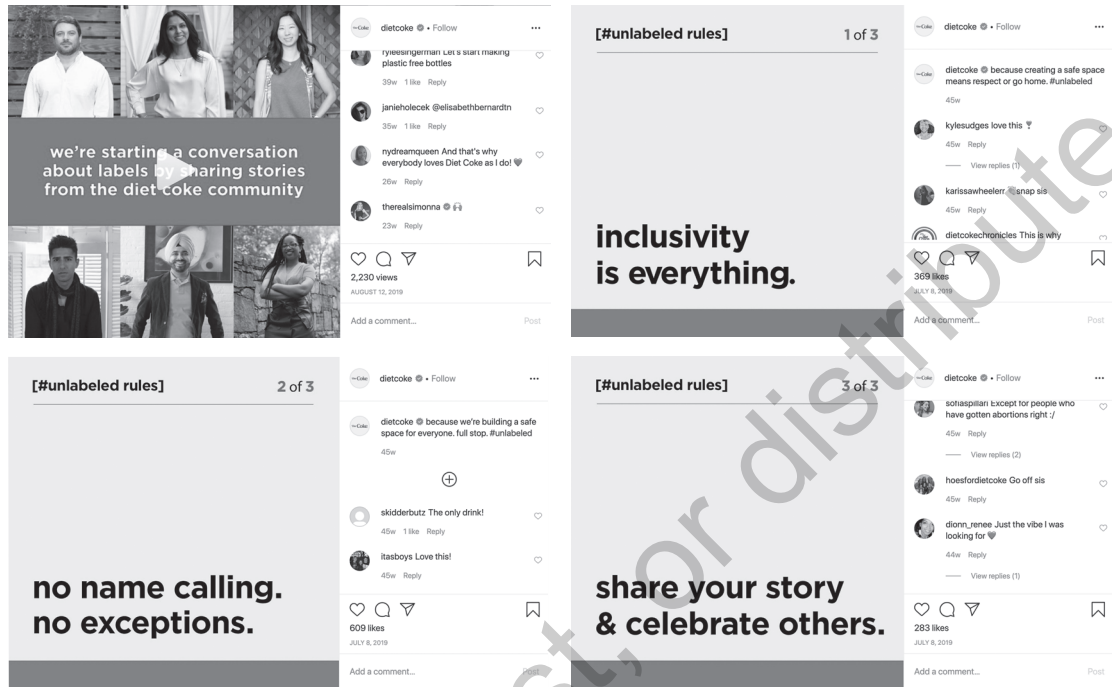
The campaign relied heavily upon social media. To launch the campaign, the company developed a series of three separate ads that highlighted the rules for “unlabeling” others.

Additionally, to gain additional reach, those featured in the campaign used their personal social media accounts to share the message. Ketzi, Ayani, Justina, Keri, and Brendan are a few of the people that utilized their sphere of influence to share the significance of the campaign.

#### Owned

A microsite, [unlabeled]<sup>TM</sup>, was created as the online space for the campaign. In addition to explaining the premise behind the campaign, the site featured the 16 people included in the initiative. If a visitor to the page clicked on an image, they could watch a video about the person and the labels they have had to overcome.

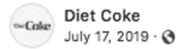




In this image posted to the Diet Coke Instagram account the company launched a series of their [unlabeled]™ videos.



The Diet Coke [unlabeled] cans debuted at NYC Pride on June 30, 2019.



we're removing our labels, to start a conversation about yours. see how we're celebrating individuals and their stories at [dietcoke.com/unlabeled](https://dietcoke.com/unlabeled). #unlabeled



In addition, the company partnered with Civic Dinners, an organization that “brings people together to have conversations that matter.”<sup>40</sup> Visitors to the site can download a PDF that walks the reader through how to host a dinner conversation surrounding “labels and how they help us and how they hinder us in society.”<sup>41</sup>

### Implementation

The campaign employed a soft launch strategy in select cities during the summer of 2019, including events such as Pride parades. According to media coverage, [unlabeled]<sup>TM</sup> is a multiyear campaign that will continue to be refined and eventually rolled out nationally.<sup>42</sup> Coca-Cola designated Instagram and Facebook “safe spaces” where consumers could share their own stories and read comments from others.<sup>43</sup>

### Reporting/Evaluation

As part of the one-month concentrated efforts of the campaign, it can be concluded that the campaign was successful, based on social media comments, likes, shares, and video views. This initial phase of this multiyear campaign explored the nuances of labels and what they mean to different people.<sup>44</sup>

## Theories

**Agenda Setting Theory:** Agenda setting theory states that the media does not tell people how to think, but it does tell people what to think about.<sup>45</sup> Coca-Cola attempted to raise the public’s level of understanding about the importance of diversity, equality, and inclusion.

**Excellence Theory:** In addition to reflecting symmetrical communication, the campaign’s emphasis on diversity and inclusion throughout the process reflects the excellence theory’s focus on diversity within the PR function.

## Model

By empowering others to challenge their thinking, open their minds, and talk about the ill-effects of labeling others, this campaign provided a platform for people from all backgrounds to talk candidly and freely. In this way, the [unlabeled]<sup>TM</sup> campaign exemplifies a **two-way symmetrical communication model**, with the organization and the campaign shaped by engaged participants and putting value in societal and community outcomes.

## Diversity- and Inclusion-First Approach

This campaign is the embodiment of diversity, inclusion, and equity and could be used as a benchmark for other organizations incorporating such initiatives. Within each step of the ROS-TIR model, Coca-Cola incorporated meaningful D&I efforts. During the research and diagnosis phase, the company worked with GLADD, AAPD, the National Urban League, and the Hispanic Federation to ensure the elements within the campaign were aligned. The strategy and tactics employed were well thought out and included nearly every element from the Diversity & Inclusion Wheel.