



## PR with Principles

July 2005

Welcome to the SPIN Project's e-newsletter, our monthly compendium of news, notes, and ideas.

In this issue:

- Last Chance to Apply for the 2005 SPIN Academy!
- Spotlight on the New [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org): The Communications Consultant Directory
- A Preview of Our New Tutorial: Community Organizing and Strategic Communications
- The Coming Supreme Court Battle

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Last Chance to Apply for the 2005 SPIN Academy!

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If you've been thinking about applying to this year's SPIN Academy, or encouraging a friend or colleague to apply, now is the time. Don't miss out on this unique opportunity!

Applications for the Seventh Annual SPIN Academy, taking place August 17 - 21 in Petaluma, CA, close this week on Friday, July 8. Our signature training conference, this residential retreat offers progressive leaders accessible, comprehensive communications training and support, in order to help organizations dedicated to social change become more media-savvy. The SPIN Academy provides training and development in:

- Specific communication tactics & skills
- Strategic communications planning
- Organizational capacity building through more effective communications
- Communications leadership growth and networking

The SPIN Academy is ideal for activists who work regularly with the media, who are in a position to share their media skills to help develop leadership skills in colleagues and allies, and who will use strategic communications to help build a stronger progressive movement.

Participants benefit from more than 15 interactive workshops led by experienced trainers on topics like Strategic Communications Planning, Coalition Communications, Fundraising For Communications, Developing Relationships With Reporters, and Reaching Your Target Audience. Participants also meet one-on-one with expert consultants, build individual media strategies, and receive valuable resources and materials to support their ongoing media work, including the Train the Trainers Kit to help participants lead media trainings of their own.

Participants also develop cross-movement relationships with other activists faced with the challenge of earning media attention for progressive issues, and deepen their understanding of the connection between strategic communications and the success of the progressive movement.

Thanks to the generosity of our funders, we're able to offer this training for only \$200-300 per person, depending on your organization's budget. This registration fee includes the cost of all training and materials, plus room and board for the five days of the conference.

Participation in the SPIN Academy is based on a competitive application process; the deadline to apply for this year's event is July 7. Full information on the event and the application form are available at: <http://www.spinproject.org/academy2005>, or call the SPIN Project at 415-284-1420, extension 330.

Don't miss this unique opportunity – apply now!

Please circulate widely...

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## Spotlight on the New [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org): The Communications Consultant Directory

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As part of the relaunch of our website, [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org), we've included a brand new Communications Consultant Directory at <http://www.spinproject.org/consultantdirectory>. If you're in the market for a communications consultant, whether it be a full service PR firm, a web developer, a graphic designer or a freelancer to help out with your campaign, head on over. You can search the directory by the consultant's location or by text contained in their entry- if you're looking for a web designer, simply enter "web", for example. The directory contains contact information as well as some samples of the consultants' past work.

On the other hand, if you happen to be a communications consultant, why not advertise your services in the directory? Just go to: <http://www.spinproject.org/consult> and fill in your details. Your contact information will then be seen by untold millions (or at least quite a few) people that are interested in strategic communications for nonprofit organizations. What are you waiting for?

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## A Preview of Our New Tutorial: Community Organizing and Strategic Communications

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Last month, SPIN Project Director Holly Minch contributed an article called "**Considerations at the Intersection:** Community Organizing and Strategic Communications" to the *Social Policy Journal*. Later this month we'll be posting an expanded version of this article on our website under the tutorials section. Here's a preview:

Issue framing and campaign communications are often vehicles for surfacing some of the toughest choices in organizing campaigns, and the goal is to identify these decisions for front-end deliberation and planning. Framing and developing messages for your efforts can reveal fundamental considerations in strategy, organizational identity, and campaign tactics. These are vital strategic questions with serious political implications, and organizers should be on the lookout for these strategic choices so they are made consciously and deliberately.

At the SPIN Project, our work walks the line between community organizing and strategic communications – we use communications tools to achieve many of the same goals shared by community organizers. In our view, strategic communications is an art – the art of presenting ideas clearly, concisely, persuasively and systematically in a timely manner to the right people. Strategic communications is about maximizing available resources and positioning your organization, and proactively framing your message. It’s about advancing your mission and achieving your vision. Sounds a lot like community organizing.

Yet we’ve observed that the following questions regularly arise for longtime community organizers when beginning to enlist communications tools to support their organizing goals. This list is by no means exhaustive and we invite feedback to help us better address these considerations in our work with grassroots organizations across the country.

## **1. Organizing And/Or Communications**

*Are communications and organizing separate tasks? Can a communications strategy ever exist without an organizing strategy, and vice-versa?*

Organizers have long recognized that one of their main tasks is to engineer strategic choices about who says what to whom and when. Social change communications practitioners face essentially the same task.

It is our belief that a well designed, gracefully executed communications effort can till the soil to create ideal conditions for organizing success. Strategic communications can plant ideas in the mind of constituents and potential allies. If the issue has been covered well in the paper or the 6 o’clock news, organizers are much more likely to find success at the door. The reverse also holds true, ideally resulting in a complimentary relationship between strategic communications and traditional community organizing. Communications can also shape the organizing environment by altering the political dialog among decision-makers. If a journalist comes knocking on your target’s door with specific questions about the issue, it can shape the context and terms of the debate.

The main differences between communicators and organizers are their tools. Organizers specialize in one-on-one interactions, while communicators tend to focus on one-to-many interactions. While communicators can create economies of scale as

they move the message toward mass audiences, nothing can replace the quality of the personal interaction created by the organizer. Organizers can address the hunger for community and belonging – which is in part created by what people see and hear in the media, and the sheer volume of information coming at them in the digital age. A good offensive needs to employ both methods – high volume communications to shape the campaign environment and high touch interactions to help develop deep personal commitments to the issues.

## **2. Reframing Your Issue and Base**

*How much of our political and organizational capital should we devote to shape the way the media talks about our base and issue?*

Part of an organizer's work is to reshape people's very identities: to help them rethink their relationship to power in American society, to help them redefine their voice in democracy and their role in their communities. And of course what our constituents see and hear in the media also plays a huge role in the construction of identity. We tell one story, but the news tells our communities something very different about themselves and the issues they face.

Modern organizers can and must employ communications to elevate the status of their base and the understanding of their issue in the media. Part of the vital work of building power for those who do not have it is to redefine the way our issues and constituencies are covered in the press. If community advocates aren't vigilant in addressing how the media frames race and poverty, who will be?

That said, reframing is an enormous undertaking and no organization will accomplish it alone. It should, however, be an ongoing task on which community organizers cooperate across issues and then integrate into all communications work. This is a case where slow but deliberate progress is utterly necessary.

The full tutorial will contain information on dealing with issues of race and class, strategy development, coalitions, and many other topics. Coming soon to the all new [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org).

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The Coming Supreme Court Battle

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As we're sure you've heard by now, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor retired last week. Organizations on both the right and left have been gearing up for this fight for the past ten years, and it looks like its going to be serious. While we don't suggest going on the attack before President Bush has named a nominee, it's definitely time to start thinking about what your organization will do when the announcement is made. We'll have more to say about this issue once the President announces his decision, but in the meantime, we present our talking points on judicial nominations that ran in this space earlier this year:

#### Problem

President Bush threatens to pursue his pattern of sending extremist judicial nominees to Congress all the way to the Supreme Court. An ultra-conservative justice will have the power to undermine vital legal protections such as a woman's constitutional right to choose, and other civil and constitutional rights regarding individual liberties, privacy, health and safety, and the environment.

#### Solution

The American people deserve federal judges who are committed to upholding the hard-fought constitutional rights secured through U.S. Supreme Court. The US Senate must ensure the moderate balance of the courts by confirming only those judges who reflect mainstream American values.

#### Action

Call your Senators and urge them to use all the means available to them under Senate rules to fulfill their constitutional responsibility to "advise and consent" to seat only judges that will uphold the values of fairness, equality and democracy on the bench.

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That's it for this issue of the SPIN Project e-newsletter. Please feel free to forward any of this information to anyone you think might be interested—we'd greatly appreciate it.

Thanks,

The SPIN Project Staff

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