



2010 Showalter Innovation Award Runner-Up – Grassroots

Nominated Organization:

American Heart Association NC Advocacy Program
Betsy Vetter
NC Director of Government Relations

Name of Person Submitting the Nomination:

LynnCarol Ray
Vice President, Government Relations and Health Alliances
American Heart/American Stroke Association
Mid Atlantic Affiliate

Submitter's Phone Number and Email Address:

(804) 965-6558
LynnCarol.Ray@heart.org

Name of Program Manager/Senior Administrator:

Betsy Vetter

What is the innovation?

You're the Cure for Smoke-free NC

A strategic grassroots campaign to support comprehensive statewide smoke-free policy

Campaign Components

Theme: *You're the Cure* for Smoke-free NC

Online Engagement Strategy

Smokefree NC Microsite (www.smokefreenc.org)

Chairman's Challenge (Recruitment plus Action)

Action Alerts (Including Thank You Alerts)

Facebook Group (<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=18423927108&ref=ts>)

Facebook Ad

Twitter (www.twitter.com/yourthecurenc)

Blog (<http://yourethecurenc.blogspot.com/>)

Offline Engagement Strategy

Statewide AHA Volunteer Engagement Activity: Heart Postcard Campaign (see attached documents)
Regional Training Events (held with coalition – during fall 2008 prior to session to educate volunteers and community members)
Regional Advocacy Team Mtgs (Formalized advocacy committee structure and divided into regional teams and held meetings to engage volunteers and educate on the You're the Cure for Smoke-free NC campaign – Nov/Dec 2008)
Media Advocacy – Letters to the Editor; Op-eds
Phone Calls to Lawmakers
Meetings with Lawmakers
Grassroots engagement with Lawmakers (Utilized top volunteers to message to lawmakers. Example: AHA Volunteer and Board Member, Dr. David Goff was quoted by the coalition in a handout given to all House members on the day of the bill vote – see attached document)
State Lobby Day: You're the Cure at the Capitol – included a news conference with the presentation of the YTC for SF Hearts to the lawmakers (see attached photo and agenda)
Delivery of YTC for SF NC Heart Campaign (volunteers hand-delivered hearts to lawmakers before the House Floor vote and Senate Floor vote)

What prompted this innovation?

The strategy was developed to incorporate activities by the North Carolina AHA Advocacy Program that would complement and enhance coalition strategies for the legislative campaign to make all worksites and public places smoke-free in the heart of tobacco country. Betsy Vetter, AHA Government Relations Director, knew that resources were limited and that she needed to be resourceful in planning activities and initiatives that would maximize both the financial and human resources at her disposal. The opponent in this effort had access to vast resources (tobacco industry) and so the efforts that were made needed to be strategic and well-planned. The process of building the grassroots strategy involved implementing the basics of grassroots organizing, and building a powerful cadre of volunteers statewide that could be trusted to get the job done.

How is this innovation likely to change the way political involvement programs are conducted?

The innovation confirms that if you build a flexible strategy using solid, grassroots engagement techniques you can find success, even in times of limited resources. It follows the “build it and they will come” strategy. Resources for all the latest technology and/or a paid campaign were not available, so in order to reach the audience and accomplish goals, Betsy and her volunteers needed to fall back on the basics of grassroots. They needed to build an army of volunteers and equipping them with the messages and talking points they need to succeed. The overarching goal was to make the smoke-free issue “*water cooler*” talk.

An integral component of this campaign was the use of volunteers to help handle the work load and to provide insight and input into strategies. A take-away from the innovation is that volunteers are the answer – give them the messages (and the science to back it up) that they need, listen to their ideas and their concerns, formalize the volunteer structure, and give them their marching orders.

Example One: The *You're the Cure* for Smoke-free NC Heart Card campaign was designed by volunteers – they gave input into the design and messaging. The purpose of the cards was to have them signed, along with a personal note to each lawmaker (from constituents), and deliver them to the Capitol. Over 5,000 cards were printed, and over 3,000 were signed and returned. When these cards were delivered to lawmakers they loved them; Why? – they were unusual. Many legislators kept the cards on their bookshelves throughout the campaign.

Example Two: They knew they wanted to utilize social media, facebook, twitter, and blogging. As the director, time was something Betsy Vetter had very little of. Answer: a team of college students took this on and set up the facebook group; the twitter account and the blog. Betsy targeted one of them as the key volunteer lead on this effort, and the word was spread from there. There was no cost to this initiative - it was all done with free technology and by volunteers. Staff time was minimal.

Third Example: Chairman's Challenge – Betsy wanted to motivate AHA volunteers to take action themselves, and then send alerts and communications to their lists of friends and family. Answer: She and her volunteer colleagues designed and implemented a “Chairman's Challenge.” The Chair of the NC AHA Advocacy Coordinating Committee wrote an email message to all advocates in the database and challenged them to act for smoke-free legislation. They set a goal of reaching and signing up 1000 new advocates. The Chairman sent a reminder message one week after the first. The Challenge was launched the first week of legislative session to coincide with the introduction of the smoke-free bill. Result: AHA sent over 4500 messages to NC lawmakers during the first 5 weeks of session (approximately 900 per week) and yes, they reached their goal of 1000 new members. Additionally they launched a second challenge when the legislation crossed over from the House into the Senate and once again saw a peak in numbers.

Fourth Example: Media Advocacy – volunteers were encouraged to keep a constant drum beat going across the state with on-going letters to the editor and op-eds. They planned “blitzes” when volunteers sent letters to the editor (all different) to news papers across the state in coordination with the timing of the moving of the smoke-free bills - when the bill was introduced, key Committee votes, and then when these bills were debated on the floor of the House and Senate. This campaign did not stop when the legislation passed – critical LTEs went out during the week the bill was signed by the Governor. Dr. David Goff, AHA Volunteer and Board Member along with Dr. Ronny Bell, AHA Volunteer penned an op-ed on the health and social justice aspects of the smoke-free issue. This op-ed appeared in the Winston –Salem Journal, right there at the home headquarters of tobacco giant, Reynolds America. The Winston-Salem Journal then editorialized that it was time for North Carolina to pass smoke-free legislation. By the end of the campaign, every major news paper in North Carolina endorsed the smoke-free policy. AHA and coalition volunteers truly influenced the turning of the media to support smoke-free North Carolina. As a part of the campaign, the coalition provided the media with weekly “editorial board memos” – just a few bullet points of information on the issue that could be used in building editorials and articles. These proved to be welcomed by the media and helped secure their relationship with the media.

What can public affairs professionals learn from your innovation?

- Lesson 1: Cultivate volunteers
- Lesson 2: Ask volunteers for help
- Lesson 3: Listen to volunteer suggestions
- Lesson 4: Assign tasks – be specific
- Lesson 5: You're the boss – its' okay to tell a volunteer to modify what they are doing.
- Lesson 6: Follow best practices – they work
- Lesson 7: If there is something you really want and don't have, ask volunteers for it.
- Lesson 8: Sometimes what is old becomes new – heart cards were just paper
- Lesson 9: Maximize what you do have – be honest with your time and resources
- Lesson 10: Don't worry it if you can't do it all – just do what you *can* do and make it work.

Finally, it is important to recognize the importance of regular, clear communication to the volunteer networkers. When it became clear that worksites would not be included in the legislation, and that the coalition could either choose to kill the existing bill or move forward with a strong restaurants and bar bill, the grassroots needed to know why. In the end, the victory celebration for Smoke-free North Carolina was stunning, and volunteers from every corner of the state felt they were an integral part of this campaign. The grassroots strategies used in North Carolina were exemplary.