

Webinar: Technology-Enabled Strategies for Social Action and Advocacy

On May 4th, the Center for Technology and Aging hosted a webinar on technology-enabled strategies for social action and advocacy to improve chronic care for vulnerable older adults. Cecili Thompson Williams, the Outreach Director on the Campaign for Better Care at the National Partnership for Women & Families gave the presentation followed by a 15 minute question and answer session. Cecili is responsible for grassroots and coalition mobilization to press for changes in health care delivery that older adults with multiple health problems and their families urgently need and deserve.

The Campaign for Better Care is a multi-year, multifaceted consumer campaign that conducts advocacy among policy makers to improve the delivery of healthcare to meet the needs of older adults. A primary goal of the Campaign is to build a lasting and powerful consumer voice, by organizing older adults, together with their caregivers, families, and friends, as activists for better care. Grassroots mobilization and volunteer management through the use of information and communications technology are key to the campaign's goal to engage people in both online and offline advocacy actions. Although e-mail continues to be the most prevalent online communication media, instant messaging, social networking, and blogging are gaining ground as communication tools.

The Campaign has identified a number of success factors in facilitating the use of technology in advocacy campaigns, beginning with knowing the audience's interest and capacity for undertaking online advocacy actions. With that foundation, it is then crucial to create relevant personalized approaches that are both interactive and engaging. A core strategic element of the campaign is therefore to ensure the clarity of the message, and to make sure that the messages and communications strategy are appropriate for the target audience. The Campaign has been able to conduct message testing (including timing of delivery), through focus groups, surveys, and polling to understand how people receive and understand the issues.

The Campaign is careful to not overwhelm people who are engaged in their campaign. Through database mining techniques, the Campaign can categorize members by their online behaviors and targets them accordingly with content that will resonate with them. This capability to understand and assess the level of online activity allows the Campaign to actively transition people between different levels within the campaign. The Campaign is also developing online mechanisms to track offline actions, through inviting people to sign up to take a pledge and then provide feedback on the outcome. Although not an entirely robust evaluation method, it nonetheless provides insight into people's experience with the campaign, and the effectiveness of their messaging and communications strategy in engaging people.

As an organization, the Campaign addresses people's fear and misuse of technology through concurrent online and offline actions. These actions include making personal calls to people and providing opportunities to attend local events that help to identify with people and the issues in a real-world context. Furthermore, the Campaign acts as a capacity builder by providing the tools and support to help their audience engage in new ways. Simply having supporting resources available such as talking points, template articles, and step-by-step instructions for tech-based actions (such as adding a logo to a blog) has an important impact on the confidence of individuals to engage other people directly on issues, even if the individual never uses these resources.

Finally, when it comes to technology, organizations need not be afraid about the possibility of failure at some point. Innovation and creativity are a natural part of the technology process.

Source:

<http://www.campaignforbettercare.org>