

The Civic Education Project

CATALYST

CEP Alumni Newsletter
2010 Volume 3
The Media Issue

The Laptop Revolution

How to use media to create social change

Think about your typical day and how pervasive the media is. You probably start your day by reading the news or listening to the radio. You might end your day with your favorite TV show and a look at that Facebook account one last time. In fact, we challenge you to attempt to be media-free for one day. We've taken the challenge before, and it's harder than you think. These days, it is difficult to choose what exactly you pay attention to.

But fret not, there's good news too! There is tremendous opportunity to impact social issues if you can effectively leverage the media. The increasing pervasiveness of media opens up new, global connections – so you can engage with people on the other side of the world that would have been unreachable in generations past. It is easier than ever to start a revolution...from your laptop! Take, for example, the following dynamic and innovative uses of the media.

Tweetsgiving is a social media campaign that aims to raise money to support projects such as building a school in Tanzania. Participating is easy: Twitter users just tweeted what they were thankful for to #tweetsgiving and donated during the 48 hours surrounding Thanksgiving. Tweetsgiving 2009 raised over \$35,000. Visit epicthanks.org for information on how you can join the celebration.

It Gets Better is a unique video-based grassroots project that offers support to LGBT youth or anyone who has struggled to be accepted by his or her peers. Gay couples, straight couples, movie stars and people from all walks of life post videos to show that, despite harassment and current struggles, it gets better. Listen to their stories at www.youtube.com/user/itgetsbetterproject



Or take, for example, traditional media coverage of a social issue that led to significant action. In the wake of the Haitian earthquake, the international community raised over \$4.2 billion, including over \$1.2 billion in emergency aid. Numerous campuses, community organizations and individuals rallied together to give – spreading the movement far and wide using their own preferred modes of communication.

You are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this media boom, given the skills and experience you have as young people. Plus, your audience is readily available. For 8-18 year olds, media usage is up to more than 53 hours a week – that's more than a full time job. Generation Y, those of us born between 1980 and the mid 90s, boasts a formidable 80 million people, which makes us even bigger than the baby boom generation. We are also the first generation to grow up surrounded by digital media culture.

So tap your assets – that is, your youth, your social networks and your ability to deftly navigate to any website, television program or news article you choose. Use the media boom to further your cause!

Sources:

www.kff.org/entmedia/mb012010pkg.cfm

www.mashable.com/2009/03/26/social-media-nonprofit-study/

Civic Leadership Institute Chicago

2010: Students practice their outreach skills in partnership with Streetwise, a paper written, produced and sold by homeless and formerly homeless individuals.

Center for Talent
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NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

“As young people, you are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this media boom.”



In today's technology-driven world, user-generated content abounds. Anyone with access to a computer can be a published author. That means that you are bombarded with a steady stream of words, images, sounds and moving pictures daily. But not everything you hear is true!

Knowledge is powerful. It is your best tool to be an informed citizen and to effect social change. So you need to be an effective detective to find the facts amid all the clutter. How can YOU take control of your media experience? CEP will equip you with the tools you need to critically evaluate the news.

Remember, the media is often pressured to tell the stories that generate the biggest audience and thus the greatest revenues – that doesn't always make for an objective piece of news. So whenever you are interacting with news media, you should evaluate the source for whether or not they have authority or expertise in the issue, and try to determine what their motive might be for advocating their particular position. Pay attention to what the pundits are and are not saying – for example, sound bites, which are short snippets taken from a longer speech or interview, are dangerous because they can easily be manipulated by taking words out of their original context. In addition, cross-reference articles from multiple sources and always look for citations or bibliographies. Most importantly, use your own critical thinking skills – if only one perspective is being presented, look for the other side and try to put yourself in someone else's shoes.

Try this – pick one current event and follow its coverage in various newspapers, TV broadcasts and websites. Ask yourself the questions on the next page. This will help you get a better idea of how the media can choose how to portray people or issues so that you can develop your own informed positions.

Sources:

"Teen Power Politics: Make Yourself Heard," 2000, Sara Jane Boyers

http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/instructor/nov04_mediasavvy.htm

<http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/teaching-media-literacy-ya-are-you-hip>

http://www.pbs.org/teachers/media_lit/getting_started.html - pbs activities for increasing media literacy

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill26.htm>

Suffix Decoder

.com

Commercial, for profit. Money is the underlying motivation here. Be an active consumer and scrutinize carefully.

.org

Non-profit. Like .edu, most .orgs are unbiased and credible. Some do have a bias and are advocates for a specific cause, which is not to say they aren't credible, but give them a critical eye.

.edu

By and large these sites are unbiased and credible, but some are personal pages of faculty, staff or students and may not be monitored.

.gov

This is a local or national government site – the information is considered to be credible.

.mil

Domain of the US military.

.net

Includes all sites that don't fit into the above categories easily. Proceed with caution.

.us/.uk/.ca/.mx

Country codes for the US, UK, Canada and Mexico respectively. These codes mean that the website is associated with a country, not necessarily that country's government. If it is the government, .gov will precede the country code.

Source: www.usg.edu/galileo/skills/unit07/internet07_08.phtml

ELECTIONS

Election season is one of the most important times to be critical of the media. When choosing your representatives, you should ensure that you are getting to the bottom of the facts, not just sensationalized opinion. How can you do this? Look at what the candidate has actually accomplished. Especially scrutinize a politician's voting record. Check out www.politifact.com or www.FactCheck.org to evaluate the truth of campaign statements, and for campaign funders visit www.OpenSecrets.org

Questions to ASK

- 1 Who created this message? What kind of credibility or authority do they have?
- 2 Why is this message being sent? Who is it targeting?
- 3 What creative techniques are used to get my attention?
- 4 How might different people interpret this message?
- 5 What lifestyles, values and points of view are promoted in this message?
- 6 Is this message opinion or fact-based?
- 7 What was left out and why?

The Perils of Wikipedia



If you've looked at our suffix decoder, you might be thinking, "Well, great! Wikipedia ends in .org so it must be credible, unbiased and accurate!" Unfortunately, Wikipedia is often the exception. Although Wikipedia is a free, not-for-profit website, the content is collectively generated by millions of anonymous users, who bring their own biases and inaccuracies. Some articles do include bibliographic information and references. Wikipedia often notes when an entry might be biased, but you must still be the one to make the final judgment.

How to SPREAD the Word about Your Issue

HOOK: Pique their Interest

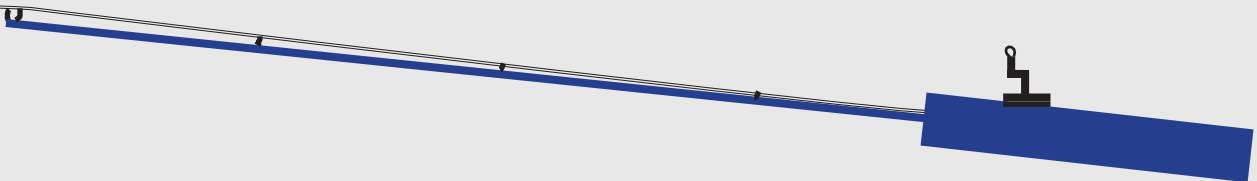
- Talking to friends, family members, neighbors or community members in general is a great first step in spreading the word. Convey why your cause is important and why they should get involved, and ask them to tell others who might be interested as well. Give them something tangible, like a pamphlet or info sheet, to take with them.
- Arrange to sit in a library or community center to pass out flyers and answer questions for a few hours. Make appearances at club meetings or town hall meetings and give a brief presentation about your issue and ways to get involved. Take a look at 'CEP At Your School' in the Updates section to get ideas for your presentation.
- Local news channels are always looking for human interest stories to highlight. They love spotlighting young people who are making a change, and luckily for us, you fit the bill! Send a press release to your local news station and let them know who you are, what you're doing and why it's newsworthy. Writing a letter to the editor of a local publication is also a great way to get exposure. They are most effective when your letter ties into a recent story in some way, so make sure you're on the look out.

LINE: Reel 'em in

- Connecting with an established organization is a great way to both get exposure to an already engaged group and to learn some valuable lessons from a larger or better-known organization. Consider planning a joint event or working on a project together.
- If people are really interested and want to get involved, identify concrete opportunities for them to do so. Have some positions or tasks that volunteers can do right off the bat (for instance, have them pass out flyers, collect signatures, or write letters to politicians or media). Make sure you have either an initial general interest meeting or a kickoff event coming up soon. If you don't have an event lined up right away, let people know what they can do in the meantime and that an event is in the works.


SINKER: Keep them Involved

- Set up a website. They're so easy to start and many of them are free. It's nice to have a place where you can send people to find out more about your issue or organization and get updates. Wordpress and Google Sites are both great hosts to start working with. Make sure you keep the site up to date!
- Create an email list. When people are interested in your group, have them sign up on a list so that you can keep track of your group members and send emails to everyone at once. Also think about starting a Google Group for help managing your list and keeping people informed.
- Have regular meetings or events to ask for input. It's important for people to feel that their voices are being heard. But make sure you don't overwhelm people. And remember to thank them for their contributions!



Civic Education Project Take a tip from us and utilize social networks like Facebook and Twitter to spread the word about your cause! You can set up a page on Facebook and invite all your friends to like the page. Post pictures and articles to keep your fans interested. Check out our page at facebook.com/CivicEducationProject for more ideas!

October 30 at 11:01am • [Comment](#) • [Like](#) • [Share](#) • [Flag](#)

 5 people like this.

Spotlight on Service

be.

BeCause Foundation

Founded: 2007

Philosophy: Be informed.
Be inspired. Be involved.

Featured Causes:

- > Burmese Refugees
- > Immigrant Integration
- > Healthcare for the Homeless
- > Child Sex Abuse in America

The BeCause Foundation embodies the cross-section between philanthropy, the arts, and social action. The Foundation creates documentary films that inspire coalitions of people to support and advocate for a social movement. BeCause was started by film-makers who have turned their love for the arts into an avenue for positive social change. Take note, their success story serves as an example of what you can do to incorporate your love of arts and media with civic engagement.

BeCause documentary filmmaking highlights the everyday people who have found innovative solutions to complex problems. Beyond this, BeCause engages new advocates through its films and develops programming around the films to build support for the issue, advancing each of these causes by screening the films around the country.

The organization's award-winning first movie, *Alone No Love*, fully embodies the organization's mission statement through its spotlight on the tireless advocates of child abuse victims in Chicago. By highlighting the courageous victims and their journeys to help, the BeCause Foundation built energy around the movement to protect children by creating a partnership with the Chicago Children's Advocacy Center, founding a resource center for abused children and sparking interest in the subject across the country.

Find one of their screenings near you at www.becausefoundation.org. You can also watch the films on their website, order the films, and share their story! Or simply use this model as an inspiration to create your own art and media for change!

Alumni Profile



Max Ling

A recent CEP alum, Max Ling heralds his time with CEP as a "completely life-changing experience." CEP taught him that service, as Max says, "is a lifestyle."

"[My time in San Francisco] shifted my perspective about how problems like poverty, inequality and homelessness should be addressed. I learned that people can relate to one another and serve one another because...they have experienced mutual emotions," Max says.

Max turned this insight into action by heading to the internet! "This new outlook helped me generate \$3,000 in hygiene goods for StandUp for Kids, \$1,300 for the Haiti disaster and \$300 for local families through Orange County Outreach." In each case, Max leveraged his own community – his classmates, teachers and fellow youth. To raise the funds for Haiti, Max motivated his peers in Model United Nations (MUN) and appealed to the 1,000 high school delegates of a MUN Conference held at his school to donate.

Max brought his newfound expertise in using social networks for good to help CEP raise scholarship money. Max promoted CEP's page to all his friends on Facebook. Shortly thereafter, CEP welcomed over 500 new fans (over 100 from Max's high school alone), raising nearly \$3,000 in scholarship funds.

For Max, these experiences were transformative, allowing him to "ascend from the role of follower and student, to that of leader...I had to draw on myself as a source of motivation for change."

So what words of wisdom does Max have for you? The key, Max says, is in connecting with people. "The most integral part of fundraising is vocal advocacy. I was able to use all of the resources available to communicate and attempt to persuade high school students to care. To effectively utilize social media, I found that networking is absolutely essential," Ling says. "Be genuine, respectful and kind." Good advice – thanks, Max!

How we know him **CTY Civic Leadership Institute: San Francisco 2009**

CivicWeek Washington DC: Politics & Urban Poverty 2010

CEP Updates

Announcing Our Spring 2011 Program Dates

Check out our new career-focused CivicWeek programs!

March 20 - March 26

CivicWeek: Politics and Urban Development in Washington DC

CivicWeek: Public Health in Chicago

March 27 - April 2

CivicWeek: Education Policy & School Reform in Chicago

CivicWeek: Public Health in San Francisco

April 3 - April 9

CivicWeek: Law & Criminal Justice in Chicago

April 17 - 23

CivicWeek: Law & Criminal Justice in New York

Visit www.ctd.northwestern.edu/cep to learn more.

CivicWeekend: An Introduction to Civic Action

CEP completed its biggest CivicWeekend yet on November 5-6, 2010 partnering again with the West Suburban Consortium for Academic Excellence (WSCAE) to organize a two-day program for 63 seventh and eighth grade students from Chicago's west suburbs. Students were introduced to issues of homelessness, education and urban farming through service projects at organizations throughout the city. They paired their direct service experiences with reflection activities and a visit from a panel of formerly homeless individuals who shared their stories. Students noted that "stereotypes about homelessness are not true...it could happen to anybody." Emerging from the weekend fired up about service and ready to engage with her own communities, one participant noted "One of many things that I want to do when I return is to help get people involved. Even if it's picking up trash or cleaning a shelter, people should get involved." We agree!

CEP @ Your School: Do an Info Session About CEP!

One of the best ways to take your learning back home is to use your story to motivate and inspire your peers.

> **Why?** There's nothing more engaging than hearing about an experience first hand!

> **How?** Tell your story, talking about what you learned and how CEP affected your life. Make sure you have lots of fun pictures and stories to share. And don't forget to contact CEP for brochures and other materials to distribute.

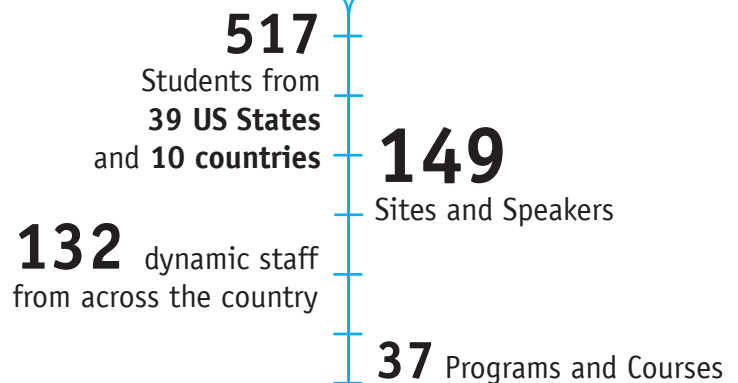
> **When?** As soon as possible! If you can organize a session this winter, you'll be giving your peers enough time to apply for CEP's spring and summer programs! Make sure you have information on hand about application deadlines, or direct them to the CEP website for more information.

> **Where?** Contact a teacher or administrator to find out how to give a presentation at your school, whether it's in front of a large assembly, or to a single class or student group, like an honors society, student council or community service club.

Join the Network

Like our Facebook page to stay connected with CEP and with other alumni: www.facebook.com/CivicEducationProject

2010 Program Statistics



Gardening tools in hand, CivicWeekend participants learn the tricks of the urban farming trade.

Inspire Young People to Change the World!

Donate to the CEP scholarship fund and YOU can ensure that diverse young leaders from low-income families have access to these life-changing service-learning programs.

Visit www.giving.northwestern.edu/nu/ctd (Be sure to choose Civic Education Project Gift Fund to direct your donation.)

The Civic Education Project combines hands-on education and community service to promote civic responsibility among young people, giving them the knowledge, experience, and leadership skills they need to make a positive impact on society.

This edition of *Catalyst* was written and produced by Jasmine Jennings and Jessica Zhao, CEP Public Relations Aides; edited by Katrina Weimholt.