

# WORDS THAT WORK

## Communications Messaging for Community Benefits Agreements

A Joint Publication of the Partnership for Working  
Families and the SPIN Project

**THE PARTNERSHIP**  
for Working Families

**THE SPIN**  
PROJECT



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## Vision

### Building a New Social Movement for Workers and Communities

The Partnership for Working Families (Partnership) promotes a new vision of organizing around economic policy and development to transform the lives of workers and their communities. Our local Partner organizations represent diverse coalitions of labor, religious, community and environmental groups that organize for better jobs, a healthy environment, more affordable housing and healthcare and accessible public services. As a Partnership, we leverage local and national resources to support these efforts, link our work through peer-to-peer learning and share best practices and legal support across regions and industries.

We believe that we can reclaim and redirect economic development to benefit low-wage workers and communities of color. Our Partners incorporate research, organizing, coalition building and policy development into effective campaigns for economic development practices and decisions that build healthy urban economies and empower working people.

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# Framing for Community Benefits



**T**houghtful framing can effectively communicate the critical essence of Community Benefits. It helps advocates forge and articulate a vision for Community Benefits, as well as develop clear language that encompasses the broad impact of urban development issues. In this section, we will look at framing basics, framing to be heard and framing examples to give advocates tools to influence and control the Community Benefits debate.

## About this Toolkit

**The Partnership for Working Families** and **the SPIN Project** are proud to bring you *Words that Work: Messaging for Community Benefits Agreements*, a communications toolkit designed to help Community Benefits advocates learn from others' experiences and integrate successful communications strategies into their own campaigns.

**Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs)** are a powerful new tool being used by organizations working for economic justice to ensure that large-scale developments serve not only the corporations that underwrite them, but also the communities that surround them. CBAs ensure that development provides quality jobs, community services, local hiring, environmental protections and improvements, affordable housing and a voice for the community in the development process itself.

This toolkit is intended to give advocates, grassroots organizers, policy specialists, community leaders and their allies the tools they need to shape public opinion through effective framing, messaging and other communications techniques. Advocates across the nation must describe complex growth and development issues using simple language and concepts to influence the terms of

debate. This toolkit can help you find those messages and incorporate a proactive communications and media component into your CBA campaign. The toolkit is also written for community members who need communications resources to tell their stories, to illustrate the dramatic effect of rampant and ineffective development in their lives and to describe a positive vision of the community in which they want to live.

In these pages you'll find best practices for creating successful CBA communications campaigns, based on the work of the Partnership for Working Families, the communications professionals at the SPIN Project and the leaders of organizations across the country who have fought for, and won, CBAs for their communities.

The toolkit is organized into three parts. Part I focuses on framing and messaging considerations for CBAs, including framing/messaging basics, tailoring messages to your audience, examples of good framing and sample messages. Part II contains case studies of three CBA campaigns led by the Front Range Economic Strategy Center in Denver, the Milwaukee Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition and Georgia Stand Up. Part III provides a sample press release, an Op Ed and a communications plan to help you implement a media strategy for your own campaign.



## About the Partnership for Working Families

[www.communitybenefits.org](http://www.communitybenefits.org)

The Partnership for Working Families grew out of efforts in individual cities to negotiate Community Benefits Agreements around large-scale, publicly-financed redevelopment projects. In the 1990s, coalitions of community-based organizations, neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations and local labor unions pushed for new approaches to urban redevelopment, ultimately winning a series of negotiated contracts with developers that ensured these projects would provide good jobs, local hiring, opportunities for education and training, affordable housing provisions, environmental provisions and other neighborhood amenities. As the Community Benefits movement grew, the Partnership for Working Families was formed to maximize the effectiveness of individual efforts by linking peers across cities, providing technical assistance and support to individual campaigns, and tapping into national-level resources that can be difficult for local organizations to access.

**Framing's basic truth is this:  
The person who defines  
the issue and sets the  
terms of the debate is  
halfway to winning.**

## About the SPIN Project

[www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org)

The SPIN Project is a nonprofit group of communications specialists who work with grassroots organizations across the nation to build their communications capacities. SPIN helps organizations increase their effectiveness in influencing debate, shaping public opinion and garnering positive media attention. The SPIN Project honors the multiracial, multicultural, diverse constituencies of the groups we train.

The SPIN Project works with a broad range of organizing, advocacy and policy organizations, all of which work to strengthen democracy and public participation. Our clients typically focus on issues concerning civil rights, human rights, social justice and the environment. We work toward a stronger democracy in which people enhance and actively participate in the public discourse.

To best meet the needs of our clients, we offer:

- ◆ Communications Audits
- ◆ Communications Strategy Development
- ◆ Skills Building and Leadership Development
- ◆ Communications Coaching
- ◆ Organizational Communications Infrastructure
- ◆ Campaign Support
- ◆ Peer Networking
- ◆ Customized Communications Conferences
- ◆ Publications

We invite you to visit our Web site at [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org) or contact us if you would like to discuss our services.



## PART I. FRAMING AND MESSAGING

### Community Benefits

Effectively communicating Community Benefits is essential to the movement's success. If you took an informal poll, most people would not know or understand terms like accountable development, Community Benefits or even sprawl. Community Benefits advocates have an opportunity to frame, clarify and contextualize this issue. They can create meaningful, values-based messages that resonate with people far more than technical, policy-oriented jargon. How can advocates put a human face on these issues? How can the Community Benefits story be told in a way that gives hope to everyday people across the country? This section of the toolkit offers some answers to these important questions. In it, you'll find:

**Basic Framing for Community Benefits** looks at the why and how of Community Benefits framing—why it is important to frame, examples of

the framing process and what frames have been effective for some advocate organizations.

**Framing Examples** explores opposition frames and their impact in shaping public perception about Community Benefits, as well frames that are ineffective for our purposes. This section will also look at successful frames and how they embody affirmative possibilities for future framing.

**Message Development** outlines a Community Benefits message. This section offers tips for cohesive and effective Community Benefits messages. It also looks at the importance of understanding your target audiences and how to reach them with your messages.

A **Sample Communications Plan** provides concrete examples of how to create a communications plan for a Community Benefits campaign.

The concept of Community Benefits is one of the most compelling grassroots economic development strategies in the United States today. It holds the promise of improving the quality of life for the many Americans who live and work in both urban and rural areas that are experiencing development challenges.

## Background on Community Benefits Agreements

Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are enforceable agreements between community groups and developers seeking to address a broad range of community needs. They ensure community participation in shaping major developments, and help shift the public discussion on economic development that meets the needs of working families.

As Community Benefits work deepens and moves into cities and towns across America, one of the biggest challenges facing advocates is communications—how we translate the goals of the work and the values that inform it to the public, policy-makers, allies and the media. There is a real opportunity for advocates to define and mold this movement to reflect our values.

The Community Benefits movement is also building power for working people, giving them the context, language and tools to organize, advocate and build the communities they envision. Living wage jobs, affordable housing and fair and responsible development are goals linked to Community Benefits organizing efforts. The next frontier is how to leverage Community Benefits into a broader movement for fair and responsible development, and communications has a critical role in shaping the future of this work.

One telling example is how the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) and a broad-based coalition of labor activists, small business owners, and clergy beat back a Wal-Mart effort to circumvent local government and the will of the community by building a Supercenter that would have provided little, if any, benefit to the community. LAANE's victory over Wal-Mart is particularly impressive given that Wal-Mart outspent them 10-to-1. Moreover, a disciplined communications strategy helped everyday people understand and remember the concepts of Community Benefits and responsible development. LAANE and its coalition partners created the gold standard for media coverage on Community Benefits. Winning messages, strategic frames, disciplined spokespeople, compelling communications plans and an understanding of target audiences are all tools that Community Benefits organizers can use to influence the political and

media landscape for Community Benefits issues.

## Basic Framing for Community Benefits

Thoughtful framing can effectively communicate the essence of Community Benefits, helping advocates forge and articulate a vision of economic justice and develop clear language to underscore the importance of development issues for communities across the country. In this section, we will explore the basics of framing and provide examples of effective framing to help advocates influence and control the Community Benefits debate.

Effective framing is critical to mounting a winning campaign. Ultimately, framing means creating and advancing your perspective on the issue. Successfully defining the issue and setting the terms of the debate is half of the battle. Framing helps you advance your perspective, putting you in a proactive stance, with your opposition on the defense. It allows

you to establish the “meaning” of an issue and control the debate by defining key points and key players. Framing needs to convey a vision that Community Benefits brings positive solutions to the lives of everyday people and it is a viable solution for

changing how development helps working families and local communities. By crafting language based on how people understand the issues, advocates can garner support from broad and diverse constituencies for Community Benefits solutions.

Moreover, framing for maximum impact gets the media—and new constituencies—interested in your issue. It is an opportunity to generate earned media (stories in the news media) through effective news hooks—the story elements that attract a reporter's attention. Framing pushes your issue into the forefront of dialogue, enabling your perspective to be taken seriously and broaden or reframe it to counter opposition framing.

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**Communications tools for success: Winning messages, strategic frames, disciplined spokespeople, compelling communications plans and an understanding of target audiences.**



## Framing Basics

Framing is your analysis of an issue—the ability to define and control the telling of your story. Framing is also rooted in values. What do you believe in? What do you stand for? What are the values behind a Community Benefits campaign? The framework defines what’s in your story, which idea you choose to promote and how you push that idea. Community Benefits campaigns carry several powerful frames that echo familiar American themes: David vs. Goliath, underdogs overcoming obstacles for the common good and a positive, optimistic vision for the future.

It’s important to note that our understanding of the American experience is a function of storytelling. We love stories because they affirm that we share a common American culture. We choose sides, identify with key players and seek a comforting resolution to crises. Community Benefits advocates can use framing to accomplish similar goals by telling compelling Community Benefits stories. The Inglewood vs. Wal-Mart struggle is a classic example of a David vs. Goliath frame that captured the country’s imagination. Wal-Mart was accustomed to setting up Supercenters wherever it wanted, without opposition—despite its anti-union policies, low-wage business model and lack of accountability. The Inglewood community with LAANE and their coalition partners fought back with the political equivalent of a slingshot and stone. Using this kind of frame will play well even with people who are not familiar with the issue, because it is a classic American story. It makes it easier for people to understand what’s happening and why they should care.

## Framing in Action

One of the most recent examples of the power of values-based framing is the CBA campaign for the Yale-New Haven Hospital’s \$430 million cancer center. The Connecticut Center for a New Economy (CCNE), along with its partners from local labor, community- and faith-based organizations, successfully negotiated a groundbreaking CBA. Benefits to the surrounding community were estimated at \$5 million, not including the hundreds of long-term jobs for local residents.

CCNE President Andrea van den Heever notes that the CBA was the result of years of negotiation, and years of painstaking relationship-building before that. “These types of victories don’t come along too often. It is of national significance because of the fact we were able, over the long period of time, to forge the ties we did between the union, the neighborhood and the faith community around a common agenda. It took us five years of intensive focus and five years before that of building community [relations]. It’s 10 years of work that got us here.”

Among the specific gains from the agreement are: support for affordable housing and neighborhood improvement in the Hill neighborhood surrounding the Hospital; increased access to health care for neighborhood residents; guarantees that the Cancer Center’s construction will be environmentally friendly; support from the Hospital for education, job training and youth programs in the community; and organizing rights for hospital employees. These benefits reflect the values of the residents that fought for them, and support their vision of a safe, economically viable community.

## Framing to Be Heard

Framing can—and must—be used to move people from general American values to action on specific issues. Advocates for Community Benefits need to understand these values completely, how to connect them to action and how to better position themselves to tell stories for their communities. To develop a frame, you need to ask yourself a few simple questions about your issue. As you build your frame, carefully consider the words you use to convey your issue and your values.

Answering these questions can also help you translate the jargon we often use with colleagues for an audience of everyday media consumers. How many people know or really understand terms like Community Benefits or responsible development? Advocates may know, but most people have no clue what we're talking about. Remember: Most daily newspapers write for the fifth grade reader. Their job is to make news and information accessible to the broadest audience possible, and they do this by making the news into a story with a moral, a narrative structure and clearly defined heroes and villains. Television news reporters don't have

time for nuance—they capture only the most basic, essential information for viewers, often relying on pictures to tell a big part of the story.

If more people are going to understand and support the Community Benefits movement, it is crucial to describe it in a values-oriented and accessible way. Detailed policy solutions and shades of gray don't fit into this model. In order to win on their issues, advocates need to understand how news outlets work and find the right stories to tell them. Policy-laden terminology requiring translation only separates us from our critical audiences.



## Framing at Yale-New Haven Hospital's Cancer Center

### What frames were employed in this campaign?

#### 1. A New Social Contract

Because Yale University, and the Yale-New Haven Hospital, have a huge impact on the neighborhoods in which they are situated, it is critical that they reflect the values of those communities, and recognize their responsibility to promote the wellbeing of their neighbors. This frame is about ensuring that major institutions acknowledge that responsibility, and ensure, in CCNE's words, "that every family in every neighborhood of our community can prosper."

#### 2. Positive Vision

Americans are optimistic, and find it easier to understand and support a positive vision than a negative one. In this case, residents could articulate a vision for the community and for their future that encompassed quality jobs, responsible development, affordable housing and safe neighborhoods.

#### 3. Win-Win Solutions

There are benefits here for everyone: Yale-New Haven Hospital, policy-makers, small business and the community all saw real, concrete gains from the agreement. This frame emphasizes shared prosperity.

#### 4. Community Participation

This is a frame rooted in the value of democracy. Americans believe in including a broad range of voices, and offering community solutions to community issues that reflect real needs.

## TO FRAME, CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS:

### What is the issue of Community Benefits really about?

Answering this question helps focus your analysis or perspective on the issue.

- ◆ Values: Fairness, participation, the benefits of development shared by the entire community.
- ◆ Context: Responsible growth and development means good jobs, affordable housing and a healthy environment.

### Who is affected?

Framing for widest reach and drama allows you to show the broad impact of Community Benefits and development decisions on many people, not just selected parts of a community.

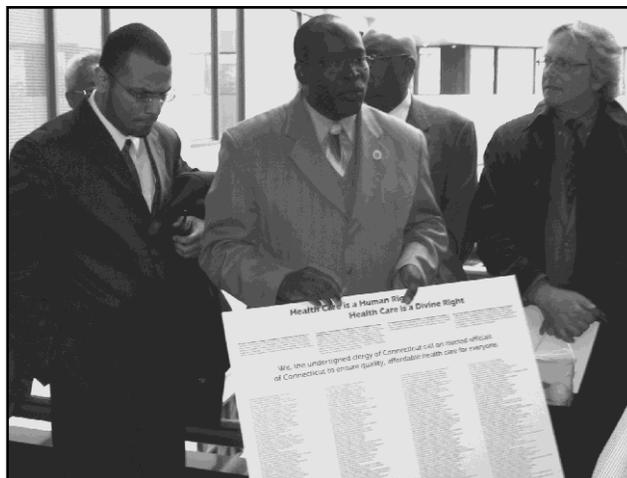
- ◆ Residents, workers, schoolchildren, merchants, business-owners, churchgoers... the entire community is affected.

### Who are the players?

Most frames will have a good vs. bad aspect to them: hero vs. villain, the Force vs. the Dark Side. People are accustomed to choosing sides on issues. This is your chance to cast these roles as you see fit—this can be especially helpful when you need to hold elected officials or developers accountable.

Framing will help determine who the players are.

- ◆ Protagonists: Community Benefits advocates and their allies in the community.
- ◆ Antagonists: Forces of resistance and lack of accountability (potentially developer associations, Chambers of Commerce, elected officials).
- ◆ Target Audiences: Influencers (who can move antagonists), your base and the public (people to act).



### What media hooks does this frame contain?

Target reporters by using media “hooks” that attract their attention and make sense of an issue in their language. The media determines newsworthiness by checking your story against media hooks.

- ◆ Controversy: Good stories often have a conflict that grabs attention. Frame the story to put the opposition on the defensive.
- ◆ Trend: Reporters love stories that suggest new opinions, behavior patterns and attitudes. Three constitutes a trend: Find at least three examples to assert that a new trend is emerging.
- ◆ Human Interest: Feature individuals, community leaders or galvanizing spokespersons who may become news themselves because of their fascinating stories.
- ◆ Localize National Stories (and vice versa): Take a national story and emphasize its local impact—for example, how does the battle over a new big-box store in your community mirror what’s going on in the rest of the country?
- ◆ Celebrity: If you have a celebrity on your side, make sure to include them in your pitches.

## What pictures and images communicate this frame?

Images and symbols can be critical to conveying the story that you want to tell. Find images that convey the values behind Community Benefits, the impact of development on the community, and your hope for the future. For example: Pictures of the community united in their demand for change, the everyday life of the community, schoolchildren petitioning the city council.

## Sharing the Frame

Framing is also about empowering others to speak about the issue. Community Benefits advocates can share a successful frame to move the issue beyond preaching to the already converted. Every opportunity to communicate a frame is an opportunity to reinforce the values and meaning that define the debate, re-frame the issue to favor Community Benefits advocates and provide the language for decision-makers and the media to help them understand the issue.



## BASIC FRAMING REMINDERS

Framing is about clarifying and promoting values. Clearly define development issues and set the terms of debate for maximum media impact.

Proactive framing means offering a positive vision for your campaign: Be *for* something, not just against something.

Do not reinforce your opposition's frame. Repeating their frames reinforces their definition of the issue, thus supporting their point of view. For example, don't reinforce the following:

- ◆ Community Benefits advocates are stifling growth and free markets.
- ◆ Development is good for all Americans and Community Benefits advocates are anti-development.
- ◆ Advocates are just trouble-makers who are against sensible growth.

You will almost certainly hear these frames from your opposition, but it is vital that you do not repeat and thus reinforce them—even to dispute or dispel them. Concentrate on your positive vision of how development can provide real benefits to everyone in the community.

Repetition and consistency are the keys to helping the frame hold. Creating an effective "echo" keeps a frame alive and moving. Echoing builds scale, creates the perception of broad public support and demonstrates real public demand for our issues. Echoes can help capture the attention of lawmakers, corporate decision makers and those whose businesses and careers depend on the public will.

## FRAMING EXAMPLES

### Effective Frames

Community Benefits advocates can localize these broad framing concepts and leverage them to help win their campaigns.

- ◆ **Positive Vision.** CBAs articulate a vision for communities and for their future that encompasses quality jobs, responsible development, affordable housing and safe neighborhoods.
- ◆ **Win-Win Solutions.** CBAs mean benefits for all, and support the idea that competing interests can actually work together for livable neighborhoods and responsible development.
- ◆ **Broad Range of Voices.** CBAs allow for, and encourage, broad participation to ensure development meets the needs of all. This frame includes not only community members, but also decision-makers and other key players in the development process.
- ◆ **Community Origins and Participation in Development.** CBAs are the result of the whole community coming together to identify what kind of place they want to live in—with everyone working together, the challenges of development that benefits everyone can be overcome.
- ◆ **Principled/Mutual Progress.** CBA advocates aren't radicals trying to block development. They are working collaboratively within the process to ensure that development works for the common good.

### Ineffective Frames

It's sometimes tempting for advocates to talk about the issues in the following ways, but these frames actually work against the Community Benefits argument. Speak to your strengths and not to the either/or, divisive language that alienates potential audiences.

- ◆ **Policy Reform.** Discussions of policy nuance do not move people. Policy details don't address values or define the stakes of the issue for target audiences in terms they can easily grasp.
- ◆ **Anti-Development.** This is a classic "Us vs. Them" frame that causes more problems for advocates than it solves. Developers seize this opportunity to say advocates simply do not want development at all.
- ◆ **Sprawl vs. Smart Growth.** This shouldn't be an oppositional frame. Smart growth is varied, responsible and a win-win possibility for all. Sprawl isn't necessarily perceived as a negative thing among those who see outward growth as an opportunity to fulfill their American Dream. Smart growth can be a tool to influence people's understanding of development issues.

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**CBAs articulate a vision for communities and for their future that encompasses quality jobs, responsible development, affordable housing and safe neighborhoods.**

## Your Opposition's Frames

While you are busy trying to frame the issue, remember that the opposition is busy creating its own frames. These are some common arguments against Community Benefits from the opposition in past campaigns. Advocates should be prepared to respond to these arguments and defend their positive vision of what CBAs can achieve.

### ◆ **Community Benefits are anti-business.**

Chambers of Commerce typically argue that Community Benefits advocates are hostile to business. Their classic argument is that tax revenues and jobs will be lost.

### ◆ **Community Benefits will stifle growth and cost us jobs.**

The frame here is that developers have all the answers to growth and prosperity, and advocates are job-killers that are driving the economy downward. In this frame, CBAs will discourage local investment.

### ◆ **Community Benefits will encourage bureaucracy.**

Community Benefits advocates are accused of adding red tape by calling for additional and unnecessary layers to government approval processes, which slows down economic growth and progress.

### ◆ **Community Benefits are driven by special interests.**

The assertion is that big labor and other outsiders with narrow interests are driving the issue—not the larger community or a concern for the common good.



### ◆ **We Already Provide Community Benefits.**

Developers will argue that they always provide community benefits, or even that a CBA has already been negotiated with community stakeholders regardless of whether such stakeholders truly represent the needs of working families impacted by the surrounding development. Developers will cite this fact with subsequent coalitions who truly represent the broad voice and concerns of neighboring residents and community leaders in an effort to bypass addressing the long-term needs of communities.

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**While you are busy trying to frame the issue, remember that the opposition is busy creating its own frames.**

## TARGET AUDIENCE

Understanding your target audience helps you craft appropriate messages to reach them. It is especially important to make distinctions among messages for policymakers, media, allies and community groups.

What is your target audience—three possibilities to consider:

**Your base:** Communities, allies and advocates.

**People who can influence the campaign target:** The people who can push that target to give you what you want.

**Secondary target audiences:** People in the community who should know about you to build power and brand awareness for your group.



## Knowing Your Audience

Community Benefits advocates can test the effectiveness of messages and determine what audiences think about Community Benefits and the issue of responsible development through polls, focus groups, interviews and research. These can gauge the mood and attitudes of intended audiences. They are supports—not substitutes—for the focused advocacy, policy and communications work that is needed to win Community Benefits campaigns.

**Polling** gauges public perception of an issue over time or in a moment. It can help you develop your Community Benefits messages or make news of findings. Track polls to look at changing attitudes over time.

**Surveys** ask in-depth questions and seek to get a deeper understanding of a particular issue. Interviews and Surveys are inexpensive ways to get information from your target audiences about their opinions on your issue.

**Focus groups** assemble people for focused discussion and to give feedback on a particular issue. Participants' opinions, perspectives and viewpoints can help you develop messages for your intended "target audiences."

**Research**—by consuming various media, including print, radio, television and online—is the most important way to understand attitudes and types of media messages permeating the political terrain. The Pew Research Center [[www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)] offers information on trends, attitudes and issues in American society, particularly related to how we consume the media.

**Understanding your target audience helps you craft appropriate messages to reach them.**



## Framing the Development Debate

Many groups working on Community Benefits strategies also face challenges related to gentrification and rapidly changing communities. Talking about these issues is a tricky business; we *do* want quality housing, jobs and the other benefits that development can bring to our communities, but not at the expense of people who have lived and worked there for generations. Here are some strategies to help you frame and discuss broad issues of development in your community.

### DO...

- ◆ Make it local—talk about how these issues are playing out in your neighborhoods and communities.
- ◆ Be clear about the goals and tone of your efforts. Are you trying to stop development or shape the way it's done?
- ◆ Remember to talk about fundamental values—why do you want what you want?
- ◆ Define “community” from many angles—schools, churches, small businesses, environment, health, transportation, workforce. These community resources are required to fuel a healthy economy.
- ◆ Tell human stories to back up the facts. Put a face on the abstract issues.
- ◆ Talk about fairness in general terms—get specific on what is currently unfair and how it can be made fairer. Be concrete!
- ◆ Use history. Talk about famous cases of displacement that resonate in your area.
- ◆ Tap into the language of smart growth—it resonates for a lot of your targets (city council, etc).
- ◆ Use arguments that focus on community-driven development, as well as strengthening community and economic diversity.

### DON'T...

- ◆ Use the word gentrification. It's a charged word that only a handful will recognize—much less relate to. Find ways to define the concept and its impacts without using shorthand.
- ◆ Say you oppose development. In the US, that's like saying you hate apple pie and puppies. Talk about the need for principled progress.
- ◆ Confuse your demands with your messages. Your demands are only part of the narrative, part of the picture you want to paint. It's not about housing or jobs; it's about creating a community for all of us.
- ◆ Let local officials off the hook. Many people believe that when it comes to development, elected officials have their own agendas—set largely by developers. Local officials aren't trusted to consider the long-term consequences of their decisions, so your messages may have an opening there.

Key Community Benefits messages should concisely communicate the key issues at stake. Many organizations attempt to discuss using policy details—or worse, political strategy—instead of putting out sharp messages with clear language that defines and makes the case for Community Benefits.

The SPIN Project recommends adopting a strategy that addresses three key points—the Problem, the Solution and the Action. This method of creating messages helps you develop short, pithy “talking points” that move to the essence of an issue, rather than jargon-filled lectures that only your allies understand. This section will help advocates design and hone key messages for audiences new to the Community Benefits movement. Once your frame helps you determine the story you want told, message development allows you to create sharp, concise messages, making the issue as accessible as possible.

## DEVELOPING THE MESSAGE: PROBLEM, SOLUTION, ACTION

### Problem

This section of the message should frame the issue clearly, broadly and in a compelling way so that the impact of Community Benefits is felt and understood by everyone—especially to those not familiar with the issue. This section defines the issue, who is affected, who is causing the problem and who is responsible for correcting the problem.

### Solution

This part of the message should convey your values. What do you stand for? What is your vision for solving the problem? How will your community benefit from fair and smart development? The solution helps you convey viable alternatives for success. You must offer a positive vision for your initiative—not just a response to your opponents. It’s also important to convey a sense of hope and possibility in this message, to suggest that change is achievable and within our reach.

### Action

This portion of the message is the call to action. You must offer a picture of leadership to your target audience, and give them a sense of what they can do to solve the problem and help achieve the solution. Keep in mind that particular actions may be different depending on your various target audiences—not every target is asked to do the same thing.

## SAMPLE MESSAGE

### Problem

Redevelopment has the potential to strengthen our communities, but the current system in Metropolis is not working well. Crucial issues such as job quality, housing and neighborhood services are not considered before a project is approved, while residents directly affected by developments have little opportunity for input. Lawmakers are forced to make decisions and commit taxpayer funds without full information, and developers must confront opposition from frustrated residents whose concerns have not been addressed.

### Solution

Redevelopment in Metropolis must focus on the real long-term needs of our communities. A Community Impact Report is a simple, common sense tool that will provide residents, policymakers and developers with the facts they need about development projects. The Community Impact Report will encourage projects that create good jobs, affordable housing and vital neighborhood services, give residents a voice in decisions that affect their lives and allow policymakers and developers to build projects that enjoy strong public support.

### Action

Give residents, developers and policymakers the facts they need to build good projects and healthy communities. Support the Community Impact Report policy.

## MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT

Here are some step-by-step tools to help you create your message.

### Problem

- ◆ Ask yourself: *What's going on here? What is the problem and why is it relevant?*
- ◆ Define the issue: Set the terms of debate, and place the issue in its context.
- ◆ Jargon alert: Avoid jargon, insider language and policy-speak in the problem part of the message. Think of people who do not know anything about your issue and explain it to them.
- ◆ Values: Does your message match up with your audiences' values, experiences and beliefs?

### Solution

- ◆ Ask yourself: *So what? Why should people care?*
- ◆ Offer a vision of success.
- ◆ Ensure the solution is viable and practical.
- ◆ Involve your audience in the solution.
- ◆ Communicate your values: fairness, participation, benefits for all (win-win).

### Action

- ◆ Ask yourself: *Now what? What do I want this audience to do?*
- ◆ Be as concrete as possible: Ask your audience to support a ballot measure, call their city council member, etc.

## SUPPORTING MESSAGES

Below are some Community Benefits messages that have proven successful in prior campaigns.

### Community Benefits are good for the City

- ◆ CBAs help policymakers be more informed on developments and how they could impact the entire city.
- ◆ CBAs prevent cities from misallocating taxpayer dollars on development projects that produce no tangible benefits.

### Community Benefits are good for Taxpayers

- ◆ CBAs ensure taxpayer money serves the best interest of the community by linking development/redevelopment with good jobs, job training, housing and other Community Benefits.

### Community Benefits are good for Policymakers

- ◆ CBAs give policymakers important information to help them make the best decisions for development projects.
- ◆ Policymakers who support CBAs are real leaders, representing the interests of the whole community.
- ◆ CBAs help policymakers consider redevelopment projects as a way to provide living-wage jobs and safe and affordable housing.

### Community Benefits are good for Developers

- ◆ CBAs help developers understand community concerns and needs, and gain much-needed public support as they seek permits and tax subsidies.
- ◆ CBAs improve community "buy-in" by addressing concerns early in the development process.

### Community Benefits are good for Communities

- ◆ CBAs give community members a voice in economic development decisions that affect them.
- ◆ CBAs meet the real needs of the community by addressing crucial needs like housing and jobs, thereby improving the overall quality of life.

## KEYS TO MESSAGING

### Message Essentials

Your messages communicate your frame, position and call to action. The Community Benefits message clarifies your advocacy position and whose interests are at stake. For example, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) essentially re-framed the debate on economic development in Los Angeles using Community Benefits framing and messaging: a positive vision, win-win solutions and community-based themes.

### Condense your Issue into Key Messages

Try to distill what you want to say into a sharp, concise message. Community Benefits policy nuance and complexity isn't necessary—capture the essence of the issue and make it as accessible as possible. Community Benefits means “fair and beneficial development and creates sustainable communities with good jobs and affordable housing.”

### Repeat Messages Over and Over

Create an “echo” effect when sharing Community Benefits messages. Repeating your key messages over and over is the only way to get them into the public consciousness. The message pipeline can carry messages through a cycle from advocates to allies, repeating the same message to influencers, repeating it in the media, in community outreach, etc. We can also echo the message with symbols and visuals that convey the essence of the issue.

### Respond to Reporters' Questions with Key Messages

Media interviews are opportunities to communicate your key messages to your intended audiences, not to the reporter. The average sound bite in broadcast media is eight to 10 seconds. Complicated policy explanations will not help here, but key messages will.



## Stay ON MESSAGE

The key here is discipline. Discipline your messages and the spokespeople delivering the messages. The combination of an effective message and a disciplined messenger will lock an issue into the audience's consciousness.

## Many Messengers, One Message

Successful Community Benefits messaging depends on creating a constancy of message across a wide spectrum of interests. This spectrum may include other advocates, allies, community partners, religious and union leadership and others. Everyone should be advancing the same essential message. And this message should be constantly echoed across all media engagement: press releases, media advisories, Op Eds, letters to the editors, television, radio and online communications.

**Repeating your key messages over and over is the only way to get them into the public consciousness.**





## PART II. CASE STUDIES

### Front Range Economic Strategy Center

*Denver's first responsible development victory: Community Benefits achieved at the Gates Rubber Factory.*

#### The Promised Land

In 2001, Cherokee-Denver, LLC purchased the Gates Rubber Factory, an old building sitting on a 50-acre parcel. The Gates company and factory had once been pillars of Denver's economy. Opened in 1911, Gates produced tires, rubber hose and automobile belts, but, like many other US corporations, moved its operations abroad. The rubber factory slowly began to deteriorate and was officially declared blighted in 2003.

After Cherokee-Denver, LLC purchased the site, Denver residents were inspired by its possibilities. Redevelopment, they imagined, could return to the site its lost status as a center of the city's economy.

Instead, the developer asked for \$150 million in tax-funded subsidies to develop high-end condos without any assurances for affordable housing, and to create low-road service jobs.

#### FRESC Leads the People

United in a vision to build responsible development for the Denver area, the Campaign for Responsible Development (CRD), a broad coalition of community organizations, labor unions, faith-based groups and community residents, was incubated at the Front Range Economic Strategy Center in 2002.

The coalition's member organizations represented tens of thousands of members and their families, and were committed to maximizing economic opportunities for Denver's communities in redevelopment projects that received public support or subsidies.

The CRD chose to target the Cherokee-Gates redevelopment project as a model for what good development could look like. The CRD proposed a Community Benefits Agreement to Cherokee that would ensure union construction, living-wage jobs and affordable housing.

## The Strategy

The Campaign for Responsible Development used several key strategies to get the developer to negotiate.

### ◆ **Broad Coalition**

The breadth of the coalition included several labor, religious and community-based organizations who, in turn, mobilized hundreds of community residents at key city council meetings and community town halls.

### ◆ **Research on Tax Increment Financing**

Through a series of studies on projects funded through tax increment financing (TIF), the campaign educated policy makers and local politicians on the failure of publicly subsidized redevelopment projects to build stronger local communities and economies.

### ◆ **Political Pressure**

Armed with this information, the campaign advocated for council members to ask the developer questions about the benefits that the community would reap, and to make specific agreements about those benefits.

### ◆ **Tenacity**

The CRD campaign remained consistent and adamant in their resolve to create greater economic opportunity and stronger local communities by standing firm on the issue over the course of three years.

## The Message

### Version I

The campaign's early frame of the issue focused on the lack of public return on public investment. This message played well with certain business publications, but organizers found the message too academic and out of reach for community residents.

### Version II

The campaign refocused on defining redevelopment as a tool for building community. Sample messages included:

We believe economic development should build communities where ordinary people can afford to live and work.

Economic development should improve the lives of people living in distressed communities.

Economic development should be an investment that improves the city's fiscal health and enriches our entire community.

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**“We believe that TIF-subsidized economic development can achieve its goals, but only if we raise the expectations for affordable housing and establish wage and benefit standards that allow people to lead healthy and self-sufficient lives here in Denver.”**

**—Robin Kniech,  
Campaign for Responsible Development**

## Lessons Learned

Early on in the campaign, leaders learned the importance of developing a frame that resonated with people's immediate needs, rather than longer-term community concerns. In the first years of the campaign, the coalition had a strong environmental frame identified by community residents near the rubber plant who feared the toxicity of the land and its effects on residents. Although the City Council called the organizers alarmist and tried to downplay the environmental angle, the campaign continued to support thorough environmental cleanup of the land.

Additionally, campaign leaders developed a keen understanding of the importance of getting to know the city beat reporters and predicting what angle of the story would capture their interest. Some reporters were more interested in the political dimensions of the issue, and focused on the process by which the city makes decisions about spending public money. In order to capitalize on this interest, the campaign had to create controversy and tension over how to hold the city responsible for how it was spending tax-payer money.

A cautionary note about long coalition names. While reporters often included the full name of the coalition—the Campaign for Responsible Development—editors repeatedly took it out, saying it had too many words.

## Win

In February of 2006, after more than three years of community mobilization and negotiations with the developer and the city, the CRD was proud to voice its support for public investment at the Cherokee-Gates site. Some of the Community Benefits won at Gates include:

- ◆ A landmark Affordable Housing Plan that includes 200 units of rental housing for Denver families with the greatest need, those at 50% and 30% of Area Median Income (50% = \$35,825 and 30% = \$21,495 for a family of four in 2005).
- ◆ Developer cooperation and participation with the neighborhood-based Voluntary Cleanup Advisory Board that is monitoring the environmental cleanup and communicating cleanup issues to affected residents.
- ◆ An unprecedented agreement to pay prevailing wages and benefits for every construction worker engaged in the publicly funded construction of site infrastructure and maintenance of public spaces and facilities.
- ◆ Selection of a union construction manager and a general contractor with a strong record of good wages, health care and retirement benefits, as well as high-quality skills and safety training.
- ◆ A commitment to use a "Best Value" selection process for subcontractors at all tiers, maximizing the chances of worker health-care coverage and opportunities to train new apprentices.
- ◆ An unprecedented agreement to extend Denver's Living Wage Ordinance to cover parking lot attendants and security personnel employed at the site's public facilities.
- ◆ An early agreement that excluded big-box grocery stores, which are typically low-road employers and bad neighbors.
- ◆ An enhanced "First Source" local hiring system that promotes the recruitment of local residents to fill new positions and, for the first time, prioritizes immediately adjacent low-income neighborhoods.

## Milwaukee Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods Campaign

### A Tale of Two Cities

In the fall of 2002, Milwaukee community leaders found out about plans to redevelop land that became vacant when city officials decided to dismantle its Park East freeway. These community leaders approached city officials to ask for information on how the planning and redevelopment process would create good jobs, but were told by the Department of City Development that the quality of jobs being created did not factor into redevelopment plans. Community leaders were extremely concerned that, as in past downtown development projects, millions of dollars of taxpayers' money would be spent subsidizing development that would not generate concrete economic gains for local residents.

Within three months, a group of 30 community and labor organizations formed the Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods Coalition (GJLN). Spearheaded by the Milwaukee County Labor Council, the Institute for Wisconsin's Future and



Milwaukee Inncity Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH), a broad array of labor and community organizations embarked on a campaign to demand that Park East redevelopment benefit all of Milwaukee, including some of the city's poorest residents. The Coalition called for a Community Benefits Agreement to be incorporated into the city's redevelopment plan. The proposed CBA



would require any projects within the redevelopment area that received substantial city subsidy to pay prevailing wages for construction and living wages for post-construction jobs; to include job training and job access provisions to ensure local residents found employment opportunities in the redevelopment area; and to include affordable housing in any residential projects.

GJLN framed the issue around *A Tale of Two Cities*, noting that Milwaukee was the seventh poorest city in the country, ranked fourth highest in child poverty and suffered from extremely high unemployment rates among people of color. They also noted that previous public and private investments in downtown redevelopment—investments which had been committed without any Community Benefits provisions—had done little to address the poverty and unemployment that had devastated many Milwaukee neighborhoods. Community leaders framed the Park East redevelopment as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor by creating good jobs, improved access to education and training and a dedicated local hiring program.

## The Campaign

GJLN's volunteer-run coalition began organizing and canvassing, held over 100 meetings with public officials and staged a public meeting where over 700 people turned out to support the coalition's efforts. GJLN developed key messages that included:

- ◆ The Park East redevelopment plan characterized the downtown area as one of the most valuable pieces of land likely to be available for development in our lifetime. If this land is so valuable, community members have a right to expect concrete benefits from its development. This is a tremendous opportunity for our city to bridge the gap between the rich and poor.
- ◆ CBA strategies have been used before by government bodies in the Milwaukee area and across the country. Many of the components of the proposed CBA, such as local hiring and prevailing wage requirements, had already been implemented by the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County and other local quasi-governmental units.
- ◆ CBAs provide concrete, measurable ways of ensuring that developers that receive subsidies deliver on the promises they make. Too often, past developments have received city subsidies based on the hope that they will benefit the community, but with no real way to ensure that concrete benefits accrue.

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**Community leaders framed the Park East redevelopment as an opportunity to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.**

## Changing Strategies

Over the course of an 18-month campaign, the coalition used these frames to change the nature of economic development discussions in Milwaukee. Unfortunately, the Milwaukee Common Council rejected the CBA in June 2004.

Immediately, the Coalition shifted its focus to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, which held title to the majority of the land. GJLN sought a county resolution requiring Community Benefits provisions to be attached to the redevelopment of any county-owned land. Continuing its program of mass mobilization, the coalition began a phone campaign which resulted in over 5,000 constituent phone calls to key County Supervisors emphasizing the desire to see Community Benefits in the Park East redevelopment area.

In December 2004, the Supervisors approved the CBA resolution, 15-to-4, voting again just a few months later to override the County Executive's veto.

Through the campaign, community leaders became experts on the development process and moved quickly to react to changing public perceptions of the campaign. Opponents argued that the CBA campaign was stalling all development and would ultimately kill Milwaukee's nascent momentum for downtown development. They decried the CBA components as too onerous and expensive for developers to sustain. They focused on what they saw as contradictions among CBA provisions, worked to pit union members against community residents and even attempted to divide the coalition on the basis of race. Throughout it all, the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition was unwavering in their use of strategic frames, continuing to argue for citizen input into the development process and pointing out that letting the market



determine the benefits had done little to solve the poverty and unemployment in Milwaukee's neighborhoods.

## CBA – A Great Organizing Tool

According to John Goldstein, one of the key architects of the campaign: "CBAs are a great organizing tool because they enable many groups to come together on a joint project. Everyone is able to hold onto their own issues and it builds the coalition in a great way. They are a powerful tool for winning good jobs and more livable neighborhoods."

CBA campaigns are a great way to organize communities to address long-term needs. Through CBA campaigns, communities organize to develop a common mission and principles on how their communities should look like and what kinds of economic opportunities should be provided. Grassroots organizing that fuels CBA campaigns builds power for working families and establishes greater community control over economic development decisions. By organizing the power of working families to direct the process and decision-making around economic development, communities shift the balance from business-directed policy and development to people-directed policy and development.

**Through the campaign, community leaders became experts on the development process and moved quickly to react to changing public perceptions of the campaign.**

## Georgia Stand-Up

*Communicating is a two-way street. Listening well is as important as projecting your message clearly.*

### In the Beginning, There Was the Win

Atlanta was founded as a railroad town. In fact, its original name was Terminus, referring to its position at the end of a great national railroad. At one point, over 1,000 trains roared through Atlanta every day. As trucks replaced trains, Atlanta's railways quieted, leaving the Beltline—a loop of tracks that encircled Atlanta and bisected many of its historically African-American and low-income neighborhoods—idle and open to redevelopment. Several years ago, academics, city officials and businesses proposed to turn the train



tracks and their surroundings into an interconnected network of green space, housing, public transportation and businesses. However, the initial proposal never addressed how the project would affect community residents already living along the Beltline. There was no mention of community benefits in return for the city's tax dollars that went to the project or a process for residents to comment on the project's impact on their community.

In November 2005, the Atlanta City Council revisited the issue of Beltline redevelopment, guaranteeing that Community Benefits would accompany a new \$1.67 billion, 25-year Beltline development plan. Georgia Stand-Up, an alliance of labor, community and faith organizations, had advocated for the Community Benefits language and was thrilled at the victory, which promised prevailing wages for the construction jobs, local hiring that targets low income residents for permanent jobs and construction apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. Finally, the ordinance guaranteed that affected communities would take part in defining what other Community Benefits they were to receive. After the initial glow of victory, Georgia Stand-Up staff and local officials began to sort through the pressing questions that would affect their communities for the next 25 years and beyond: What defines Community Benefits? Who is the community? Who gets to define them? What process is used in forming that definition?

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**Communicating is a two-way street.**

## Georgia Stand-Up Begins to Organize

With the large task ahead, Georgia Stand-Up convened community leaders from the underrepresented neighborhoods of Atlanta to discuss the impact Beltline redevelopment will have on their neighborhoods. Georgia Stand Up began its organizing by bringing together the recent graduates of Stand-Up's Policy Institute for Civic Leadership, a six-week intensive course designed to bring together community, neighborhood, labor, political and faith leaders to discuss issues such as smart growth and the regional economy. In the winter of 2006, Stand-Up had 30 leaders from around the Atlanta area participate in the Policy Institute, and through these leaders they began to organize around the issue of gaining broader public participation in the Beltline Community Engagement Toolkit.

Georgia Stand-Up held meetings with community leaders twice a month to discuss how outreach could be done in their neighborhoods to make the survey a more effective tool for gaining community input. The group formed an alliance, and its members identified the need to create a help sheet for residents to use when filling out the survey. The purpose of the help sheet was to break down difficult concepts, as well as to explain commonly used terms in the toolkit, such as economic development and historic preservation. Despite these efforts of Georgia Stand-Up and its alliance members, two weeks before the end of the deadline for community input, the response rate of residents in the Southside of Atlanta was still low in comparison to other areas of the city.

Recognizing the need for another method of outreach to these neighborhoods, the strategy committee for the alliance planned a Community Input Session to gain the input of leaders from the historic neighborhoods of the city. The session was intended to provide a venue for leaders to come together and collectively express their opinions regarding the Community Engagement Toolkit, as well as provide an opportunity for these leaders to learn more about the Community Benefits principles amendment in the Beltline ordinance. Stand-Up sent out invitations to over 200 community leaders around the city inviting them to attend this special community input session.

As a result of the meeting, participants completed a consensus survey expressing the ways in which the Beltline could truly benefit the communities that have been traditionally overlooked around the city of Atlanta, with over 50 community leaders from around the city signing off on the results. These results were delivered to the Atlanta Development Authority, along with over 300 individual surveys filled out by residents along the Southside. Since this meeting, Stand-Up has been organizing these leaders, as well as many others around the city, to continue developing a plan for ensuring that the Beltline will be a project that will benefit all Atlantans. The Atlanta Beltline story illustrates the importance of finding the right communications strategy for connecting with key constituencies and communities.

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**The Atlanta Beltline story illustrates the importance of finding the right communications strategy for connecting with key constituencies and communities.**



## PART III

### Communications Tools

This part of the toolkit contains practical tools to help you plan and implement the communications component of your CBA campaign. Here you'll find:

- ◆ A sample Press Release
- ◆ A sample Op Ed
- ◆ A sample Communications Plan

**Organizational logo, Web address and contact information** should appear at the top of all releases. Organizational letterhead is often appropriate for this. Make sure to include your press contact's office phone, cell phone and email. If there's any chance your primary contact will not be available, list a secondary contact to ensure you do not miss out on valuable press opportunities.

**Including a headline and sub-heads** is critical, since busy reporters usually spend 30 seconds or less scanning a press release. Attract attention, but do not undermine your credibility with histrionic language. A good story doesn't need to rely on inflammatory rhetoric to attract interest.

**The lead paragraph** is the most important part of the release. The lead frames the issue for maximum media impact.

### Sample Press Release

Contact:  
 Danny Feingold, Communications Director  
 Office: (213) 977-9400, ext. 109  
 Cell: (213) 555-1212  
 Email: dfeingold@laane.org



### Council Approves \$500 Million

#### Agreement to Help Communities Near LAX

Landmark Deal Sets National Precedent with Far-Reaching Package of Environmental and Economic Benefits for Residents Affected by Airport Modernization

The Los Angeles City Council today overwhelmingly approved a landmark community benefits agreement that provides major environmental and economic improvements to communities affected by the planned modernization of Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).

The legally binding agreement—the result of months of discussions between the City, LAWA and more than 20 community groups, environmental organizations, school districts and labor unions—will establish a national precedent for community improvements around large-scale development projects. At \$500 million, it represents the largest and most comprehensive community benefits agreement ever negotiated, designed to address known impacts to surrounding communities through improvements to environmental, labor, noise and health conditions.

“This agreement shows that by working with the surrounding communities from the beginning, large-scale development projects can result in economic benefits, social benefits and environmental benefits,” said Jerilyn López Mendoza, policy director of the Los Angeles office of Environmental Defense, one of the lead organizations involved in the negotiations. “By easing the pollution burden from LAX, this agreement secures a huge health and quality-of-life victory for area residents. This agreement can now serve as a national model for other large-scale development projects and affected communities to bring economic and environmental benefits to their own neighborhoods.”

The agreement will now go to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), along with Los Angeles Mayor Jim Hahn’s \$11 billion plan to renovate and modernize LAX.

“This agreement is a milestone for the growing Community Benefits movement,” said Rev. William Smart, senior community organizer at the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, which pioneered the concept of Community Benefits Agreements and played a lead role in the negotiations. “We have demonstrated that when communities have a place at the table, economic development works better for everyone. This shows that responsible development is possible.”

The agreement offers significant economic opportunities and quality-of-life improvements to residents east of the airport, who historically have suffered the worst consequences of airport development and had little voice in the decision-making process.

It is also the first Community Benefits Agreement negotiated with a government entity. When the coalition approached Mayor Hahn late last year to propose the agreement, he immediately demonstrated his commitment to the communities surrounding the airport by directing Los Angeles World Airports and his own staff to work with the coalition to negotiate the agreement. Previous agreements, including half a dozen in Los Angeles, have been reached between private developers and community organizations.

“This Community Benefits Agreement is a national model for airport development and serves to enhance the quality of life of the communities surrounding LAX as we move forward with our plans to make LAX safer and more secure for the millions of travelers who pass through the airport every year,” said Hahn. “I am proud that together we have developed a comprehensive environmental, economic and educational Community Benefits Agreement that will directly benefit the communities most impacted by operations at LAX.”

The key improvements that would result from the Community Benefits Agreement include:

- ◆ Sound-proofing all affected schools.
- ◆ Increasing funding for the sound-proofing of homes.
- ◆ Retrofitting diesel construction vehicles and diesel vehicles operating on the tarmac to curb dangerous air pollutants by up to 90%.

**Include a compelling lead quote** within the first 2–3 paragraphs, to frame the issue and clarify your most important news.

**Use the Inverted Triangle Model** to prioritize your framing points. After the lead, begin to fill in the story’s details. The inverted triangle model ensures that the most important news hits the reader at the top, and narrower details are filled in further down in the piece.

**Aim for readability.** The goal of your writing should be for the reader to comprehend your information as quickly as possible, not to impress them with sophisticated prose. Use short sentences.

**Proofreading, spell-checking and consistency are critical.** A press release says a lot about you as an organization. Make sure it makes you look good!

**Develop your message with supporting quotes.** Continue to frame by building your cast of characters. Extra perspectives from different people can entirely recast a story.

**Indicate the end** of the release by typing “###” at the bottom of the final page. If your release is more than one page long, be sure to include page numbers and write “more” at the page breaks.

**Include a boilerplate** description of your organization. Don’t assume reporters know who you are or trust them to define your work. At the end of your release, briefly describe your organization and direct reporters to your Web site for more information.

**Start with a strong lead.** Op Eds need to grab a reader’s attention quickly, so make sure your first paragraph is strong. Chris Nevitt explains how Coloradans are being kept in the “dark” about how tax funded subsidies are spent and how they will benefit the community.

- ◆ Electrifying airplane gates to eliminate pollution from jet engine idling.
- ◆ Studying the health impacts of airport operations on surrounding communities and making those studies public on the LAWA Web site.
- ◆ Providing \$15 million in job training funds for airport and aviation-related jobs.
- ◆ Creating a local hiring program to give priority to local residents, low-income and special needs individuals for new LAX jobs.
- ◆ Enhance opportunities for local, minority and women-owned businesses in the modernization of LAX.
- ◆ Monitoring LAX, enforcing the agreement’s provisions and holding LAX accountable to the community.

“The Community Benefits Agreement has given disparate groups an opportunity to come together and work out differing opinions about how the development should be done,” said Daniel K. Tabor, an Inglewood resident and community activist who helped lead the negotiations. “As a result, LAWA and the City have avoided costly and lengthy litigation and the community will get health and jobs protection up front.”

###

Founded in 1993, LAANE is recognized as a national authority on issues affecting the working poor and an innovator in the fight against working poverty. Combining a vision of social justice with a practical approach to social change, LAANE has helped set in motion a broad movement based on the principle that hard work deserves fair pay, good benefits and decent working conditions. Visit [www.laane.org](http://www.laane.org) for more information.

## Sample Opinion Editorial (Op Ed)

### Subsidy Sunshine Needed for More Healthy Economic Development

by Chris Nevitt

Coloradans enjoy over 300 days of sunshine a year, but too little sunshine falls on our economic development subsidy practices. Lack of transparency, an absence of clear expectations and a failure to track measurable outcomes, all keep Coloradans in the dark about how millions in tax funded subsidies are spent, and the public benefits they are meant to be generating.

Nationally, state and local development subsidies have ballooned to an estimated \$50 billion in annual costs to taxpayers. In Colorado, Denver taxpayers alone are now committed to over \$500 million in tax-increment financing subsidies. These are not spent directly out of Denver’s treasury but instead take the form of foregone revenue—

taxes collected, but diverted to fund private development projects before ever reaching city coffers. Regardless of whether these subsidies are taxes spent or taxes never received, they are a substantial and growing sum—in Denver equaling roughly 7% of the city’s annual general fund budget.

The idea behind such subsidies is that they catalyze growth, create jobs, strengthen local economies and benefit our communities. But do they? Led by the national subsidy watchdog group, Good Jobs First, communities across the country are beginning to ask “are taxpayers getting their money’s worth?” As detailed in the recent book, *The Great American Jobs Scam*, the answer has often been “no.” The focus on the issue, however, is resulting in more focused and effective subsidy policies, greater accountability, more transparency and robust community involvement. “Sunshine,” in short, is improving the health of economic development efforts across the country.

In Colorado, unfortunately, citizens remain in the dark. Local tax subsidy expenditures are not accounted for in local budgets, leaving citizens and policy makers debating painful cuts while unaware of millions they are already spending elsewhere. The recent travails of Lakewood and their heavily subsidized Wal-Mart are a painful case in point. While developers generally must justify their need for subsidies, these calculations are often based on developers’ own estimates, and are not available for public examination, even years afterwards.

Citizens also remain in the dark about the specific economic and community goals their subsidies are meant to achieve. Even Denver, perhaps Colorado’s most sophisticated dealer in tax-funded development assistance, appears to be functioning entirely without a strategic plan to guide its subsidy program. Denver’s public has certainly never had the opportunity to debate such a plan, much less the specific benefits the community should expect from subsidy recipients. Instead, the initiative for the use of subsidies is left almost entirely up to private developers themselves, and they are not required to detail the number or quality of the jobs they will be creating, and whether those jobs will have health care. This often results in low-wage, low-benefit jobs that produce little economic stimulus and exacerbate public service burdens. Nor are subsidized projects required to detail their likely impact on existing business, often leading to small local merchants forced to compete against subsidized big-box stores.

Finally, Colorado citizens remain in the dark about their “return on investment” from subsidies. There is little or no effort to measure or track the economic and community impacts from subsidized projects once they are built. Partly, this stems from the failure to establish clear and quantifiable expectations in the first place. Nonetheless, local governments typically fail to collect even the most basic economic data from subsidy recipients, or about subsidy impact areas, much less analyze their net effects.

#### **Aim for concise writing.**

Op Eds are generally 500–900 words long. Use short sentences and paragraphs to get your point across.

#### **Frame the issue quickly.**

After the lead, Nevitt immediately develops the frame, pointing to how “sunshine” improves the health of economic development through civic participation and helps achieve community-wide goals by creating good jobs, a stronger economy and a healthier community.

#### **Communicate your message.**

Clearly state the main message of your Op Ed early in the piece. Here, the main message is that citizens remain in the dark about public subsidies, a reality that threatens the health of the community.

**Keep to the point.** A healthy community cannot remain in the “dark” about local subsidy expenditures, the economic and community goals their subsidies are meant to achieve or how a city measures economic and community impacts once subsidized projects are built. This does not make for a healthy community.

**Conclude with your message.**

End the piece by reiterating your key message. Nevitt details “subsidy sunshine” suggestions for government accountability and transparency for healthy economic development.

**Pitch It!** Pitch your Op Ed to the Opinion Editorial or Editorial Page editor at your target newspaper. Call first to gauge their interest level, then fax or email the Op Ed with a cover letter and follow up to make sure they received it. Don’t submit the Op Ed to another outlet unless your first target decides not to run it. If at first you don’t succeed, consider other outlets or re-writing the piece.

**Who’s the author?**

Who signs the Op Ed is a strategic consideration—make sure that the person identified as the author has credibility with your audience. Finding a leader in your community to co-sign the Op Ed can be a great way to catch the attention of readers.

Subsidy “sunshine” does not impede economic development. To the contrary, it promotes civic engagement, raises the bar for public expectations and improves accountability. This can only increase the likelihood that subsidy dollars achieve their stated goals: good jobs, a stronger economy and healthier communities. Most of us believe government has an important role to play in promoting economic development. Publicly funded education and infrastructure are key ingredients for successful economic development, and passage of Referendum C is a major step toward preserving the economic viability of Colorado. But effective government also depends on an informed citizenry, able to understand and influence the policies that guide its actions, and to debate their costs and benefits. This applies as much to tax subsidies as it does to direct government expenditures.

This summer and fall, the Colorado legislature convened an interim committee to examine state economic development policies, and this committee will be introducing several measures in the upcoming legislative session. Unfortunately, while the committee made a good start toward clarifying job creation and wage and benefit expectations for direct state subsidy programs, it left the vast sums of locally-administered subsidies to continue being spent in the dark. Our state legislature needs to come to grips with how local governments must better inform and involve the public in subsidy decisions, and must hold their subsidies accountable for achieving clear, verifiable goals. There is still time for the legislature to assemble sensible measures to bring “subsidy sunshine” to local economic development in Colorado. Here are several suggestions:

Require clear accounting for subsidy tax expenditures in budget publications.

Promote formulation of local strategic plans for the use of subsidies, including clear and measurable expectations from subsidy recipients, and require robust community involvement in developing these priorities and expectations.

Require subsidy recipients to estimate jobs, wages, health benefits and impacts on existing local businesses, and to report subsequent outcomes from their projects.

Increase the transparency of information justifying the use and amount of proposed subsidies.

Subject subsidy programs to regular and independent performance audits.

Sunshine is essential for the health of plants, animals and people. It is also essential for the health of our economy and our communities. Hundreds of millions of dollars in Colorado taxes should not be spent in the dark.

Chris Nevitt, Ph.D., is policy director at the Front Range Economic Strategy Center and co-author, with Tony Robinson, of *Are We Getting Our Money’s Worth? Tax-Increment Financing and Urban Redevelopment in Denver, Parts I & II*

140 Sheridan Blvd.  
Denver, CO 80226

## Sample Communications Plan

The legally binding Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) signed by the city of Los Angeles in December 2004—the result of months of discussions between the city, Los Angeles World Airports (the city-owned system of airports in LA) and more than 20 community groups, environmental organizations, school districts and labor unions—is perhaps the clearest victory yet for Community Benefits work. At half a billion dollars, it represents the largest and most comprehensive Community Benefits Agreement ever negotiated, covering a broad range of impacts including environmental, labor, noise, health and accountability issues.

You can use this plan as a model for a communications plan for your own work. For more tips on creating a strategic communications plan, and a template you can use to create your own plan, visit [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org).

## Communications Plan for LAX Community Benefits Agreement Campaign

The LAX Community Benefits Agreement media plan is designed to convey a simple, compelling message through media actions, feature stories, Op Eds and editorials.

Our media message is crafted to achieve maximum appeal. To sustain coverage, we should consider a variety of actions, escalate the intensity of those actions if needed and call on high-profile public figures for selected events.

Dynamic, articulate spokespeople, both English- and Spanish-speaking, will be crucial to our campaign. These should include residents, community leaders, advocacy group representatives, elected officials, businesspeople and other respected public figures.

Fact sheets supporting our case and endorsements from a range of public figures will also help strengthen our campaign. We should be prepared to provide reporters with detailed information about the negative impact of LAX development projects on communities in the past, and how this will change if our policy is adopted.

## Goals

### External

- ◆ Win Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) for LAX modernization plan

### Internal

- ◆ Build strong coalition between environmental, labor, community groups
- ◆ Build community support for accountable development work in LAX communities

### Target

- ◆ LAWA Commission
- ◆ City Council

## An “Executive Summary”

can be useful for sharing your plan with other staff members. The authors of the plan begin by laying out what they see as the key aspects of their communications work: a disciplined message, a range of media work, support from public figures, dynamic spokespeople and solid information for reporters.

## Be clear about your goals.

What do you want? Why are you launching a campaign in the first place and what is your positive vision for the future? Be bold and be specific. Here, the authors divide their goals into External (Win a CBA for LAX) and Internal (Build a coalition across issue areas and increase support in the communities around LAX for accountable development).

## Identify your targets.

Who can give you what you want? Can you influence your target directly? If not, who has the power to influence them? These are your target audiences. Here, the authors focus on the commission in charge of making decisions at the airport, and the City Council members who must approve the CBA.

**Frame the story.**

Describe the issue in a way that resonates with your targets and is also interesting to journalists. What is the story really about? Who is affected and who are the players? Here, the authors decide that they will tell a story about residents coming together to better their communities. It's a "win-win" story, good for the residents and for the city, and one that City Council members will want to get behind.

**Craft and discipline your message.**

The Problem lays out your frame. The Solution is your positive vision for the future. The Action calls on your audience to take some specific steps. Here, the author's frame describes the missed opportunities and negative impacts on LAX's neighbors because they weren't consulted in its growth. The Solution presents the CBA as "good for our communities and good for Los Angeles." Finally, the Action calls for support of the CBA to protect the environment, improve education and provide good jobs.

**Target Audience**

- ◆ Voters in District X
- ◆ LAX Communities

**Frame**

We want this story to focus on the betterment of communities adjacent to LAX. We should emphasize the benefits of the agreement—local jobs, environmental protection, better education—as well as the political empowerment of these communities. It should be a story about residents coming together to improve their communities. It is also a win-win story—good for affected residents, good for the city, good for Angelenos.

**Message****Problem**

LAX is an essential part of our region's economy, but, for decades, airport development has come at the expense of neighboring communities. Residents have not been included in the process, resulting in negative impacts on our health, our schools and our neighborhoods.

**Solution**

This groundbreaking Community Benefits Agreement protects the rights of residents and gives us a real say in the region's most important economic development plan. The agreement guarantees that the mayor's LAX modernization plan will protect residents' health, provide them with access to good jobs and improve the quality of our schools and neighborhoods. It's good for our communities and good for Los Angeles.

**Action**

Join us in supporting the Community Benefits Agreement for LAX and help us guarantee a healthier environment, better schools and good jobs for our communities.

False choice between airport development/jobs and community/environment. Can move forward with both.

**Key Arguments**

1. CBAs make business sense by avoiding costly and timely litigation and bad PR. Jobs vs. the environment is a false choice.
2. CBAs give communities a place at the table and a voice to help shape where they work and play. With this empowerment, communities can make development work for them.
3. CBAs have been proven to work.
4. CBAs create environmental and social benefits.
5. This CBA is a national model for alternative dispute resolution.
6. Broad community support for CBA.
7. Unites unlikely partners.

## Spokespeople

- ◆ Environmental Justice
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Health Care
- ◆ Clergy
- ◆ Labor
- ◆ LAANE
- ◆ City
- ◆ Community Leaders/Residents

**Note: Use residents/activists from other CBAs at press conference, hearings and Council meetings, with message that CBA has worked for their communities.**

## Spokesperson Training

Selected spokespeople will participate in a training on campaign message and public speaking skills.

## Materials

- ◆ Coalition one-pager
- ◆ CBA one-pager
- ◆ Other CBAs
- ◆ LAX communities backgrounder
- ◆ General Q&A
- ◆ Coalition member profiles
- ◆ Message and key arguments (internal)
- ◆ Media prep Q&A (internal)

## Media Events

- ◆ CBA press conference

## Speakers

Community Leaders

Environmental Leaders

Clergy

Elected Officials

## Visuals

Planes, playground, handkerchiefs, signs (healthy communities/livable communities)

**Select and train spokespeople.** Who are the best spokespeople to reach your target audience? Remember: Sometimes the person delivering your message is as important as the message itself. Here, the authors choose a diverse coalition of community leaders to act as spokespeople, as well as community leaders from other cities with CBAs to talk about how they've worked out for their communities. After the spokespeople are selected, they need to be trained on the messages they will be delivering.

**How to get the message out?** How are you going to let people know about your campaign? What materials can you produce and what events can you schedule to support your message? Here, the authors list the documents they'll need, both internal and external, to discipline their message and get the word out through reporters. Key speakers and visuals to attract television reporters are noted for a planned press conference.

**Who will you pitch this story to and how?** Which reporters have written about your issue in the past? Which television programs are watched by your target audiences? Build a list of reporters you want to pitch. Be as specific as you can and choose outlets that are influential with your target audience. You might also consider placing an Op Ed in your local paper, booking your spokespeople on a local affairs talk show, writing letters to the editor or creating an advertising campaign.

## Story Angles

- ◆ National precedent for CBAs
- ◆ Groundbreaking community/labor/environmental coalition
- ◆ Precedent-setting environmental justice provisions
- ◆ Empowerment of underserved LAX communities

## Target Outlets/Reporters

Print/Local:

*Los Angeles Times*, Reporter X

Print/National:

*New York Times*, Reporter X

*Wall Street Journal*, Reporter X

## Radio/Local

KFWB

KFA AM 640

## Radio/National

NPR, *Talk of the Nation*

## TV

CBS 2, Reporter X

ABC 7, Reporter X

## Op Ed

## Editorials

## Columnists

## Talk Shows

## Letters to the Editor

## Paid Media

## Conclusion

We hope that this toolkit has provided you with some useful tools to begin planning the communications aspect of your CBA campaign. Creating a strong strategic communications plan, with clear goals, compelling, well-targeted messages and disciplined implementation, will help win real benefits for your community.

The Partnership for Working Families' Web site ([www.communitybenefits.org](http://www.communitybenefits.org)) contains research, reports and resources related to economic justice in general and CBAs in particular.

The SPIN Project's Web site ([www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org)) contains free tutorials, articles, links and other resources related to strategic communications.

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