

# The California Wellness Foundation

*Grantmaking for a Healthier California*

# Reflections

On Communications  
Strategies That  
Accent Grantees



The California Wellness Foundation

*At The California Wellness Foundation, our work revolves around our mission to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, disease prevention and wellness education. Staying focused on our mission requires a clarity of purpose among our board and staff. If we are to be successful, it is also vital that our grantees and other key audiences have a clear understanding of our mission and how we work to achieve it.*

*For these reasons, communications for us is not simply an afterthought or a department established to support the needs of our programs. Rather, we seek to weave communications into the very fabric of our organization so that we can speak with one voice — conveying messages that clearly and effectively represent the goals of our grantmaking, spotlight the work of our grantees and share the lessons we learn with our colleagues.*

*Other foundations have used communications in myriad ways, including positioning themselves as the primary resource of information for media and policymakers and providing communications technical assistance to grantees. These are appropriate approaches to achieving their goals and are tactics we have used as well.*

*But for us, it comes down to using communications strategically as a common thread to further the work of the whole that makes up the tapestry of our Foundation: our grants program, finance, administration, and communications departments are all united in their desire to provide resources to the underserved through the work of our grantees.*

*For example, our eight priority areas and Special Projects Fund have distinct goals, yet each one relies on the common communications activities outlined in this issue of Reflections — namely, telling the stories of our grantees through our core publications, website, media relations and advertising. And this includes providing media training to our executive staff, communications officers and program directors to ensure that we are consistent in our responses to the news media.*

*Our communications program did not develop overnight, and we have learned several lessons along the way. We have implemented policies that require attentiveness to enforce and flexibility to adapt when necessary. But the commitment to a unified communications strategy is steadfast and strongly embraced by our Foundation's leadership.*

*As we continue in our efforts to keep our communications clear, thoughtful and effective during these difficult economic times, we hope we can also contribute what we have learned to others who are striving to integrate communications within their organizations. We encourage your comments and feedback.*

**Gary L. Yates, President and CEO**  
The California Wellness Foundation

# Reflections on Communications Strategies That Accent Grantees

*By Magdalena Beltrán-del Olmo and Roni Hooper*

Foundations have historically had an uneasy relationship with communications. One reason for the apprehension may have its roots in early philanthropists who believed in the virtue of anonymous giving. However, many foundations now recognize the value of communicating their work, but have difficulty defining what the communications program should look like. After all, the goal of communications is not always clear in the field of philanthropy.

For-profit corporations communicate to sell products or services. Nonprofit organizations, in general, communicate to attract clients to their programs, to increase awareness about public issues or to raise money. It may appear that most foundations, with the exception of community foundations, do not need to communicate because they have no product to sell or money to raise. But this is certainly not the case.

Like any type of organization, a foundation exists to fulfill its mission. If no one knows what that mission is, then the work becomes virtually impossible. Therefore, at the most basic level, the core message of a communications program should be the foundation's mission statement. From there, it is a matter of defining who the audiences are and what information those audiences need to become partners in fulfilling that mission.

The mission of The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF) is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention. Since its inception, TCWF has shaped its communications activities around that mission. We are often asked why we have a communications program, how it is structured, and how we work with our grantees to convey our shared messages. Our answer is summed up in two words: "strategic communications." While it may sound like jargon to some, we have not yet found a better term to convey the simple elegance of communicating effectively to a variety of audiences.

In recent years, the use of and discussion about strategic communications have grown increasingly popular in the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. For us, it is simply "telling a good story." Telling our stories in ways that not only appeal to our audiences — but also engage them in our mission — takes hard work, but we believe we do it well. In this *Reflections* issue, we hope to share what we have learned about communicating TCWF's mission by tailoring messages to reach specific audiences through the use of compelling stories.

## STORIES WORTH TELLING

*Grantees have good stories to tell, as well as the promise of compelling chapters yet to be written.*

A good mission statement doesn't sit on a shelf in a strategic planning book, but is carried out daily by real people doing important work. Our Foundation makes grants to organizations and people who work to improve health. Grantees have good stories to tell, as well as the promise of compelling chapters yet to be written.

Grants have all the components of a good story, such as the conflict found in the hardships uninsured families face in trying to access healthcare. And tragedy, such as parents who have lost their children to gun violence. There is also often a moral to the story. For our grantees, a recurring theme is that it is better to prevent disease than to treat the more expensive medical problems that can arise from inadequate health care, environmental health hazards, violence and teen pregnancy. And there are some wonderful fairy tale endings, such as new policies that create or support programs that inspire young women to go to college rather than accept the idea that teen pregnancy is inevitable because they are women of color from low-income communities. Then there are those rare stories that inspire or make the spirit soar, like the priest who creates jobs for gang members in his community and doing so, practices what he preaches: “nothing stops a bullet like a job.”

We strongly believe we owe it to our grantees and the people they serve to use our non-grantmaking resources to tell their stories. So our entire communications program is focused on our grantees and their work. Why? Because the people most affected by a problem often have little or no opportunity to contribute to policy changes, to propose solutions or to be involved in efforts that can increase resources to address the very issues that disproportionately affect their lives. We want to be a partner in telling their stories. Their messages and proposed solutions are there. However, policymakers and opinion leaders may not be hearing their voices.

Here is where the power of philanthropy can help. Our Foundation uses its arsenal of communications tactics — publications, media relations, the Internet, video productions and advertising, among others — to amplify the voices of grantees and the underserved so that their messages can reach key audiences and, in the best of circumstances, improve people's lives.

Our work relies heavily on adapting the best practices found in general news media markets and ethnic media newsrooms. We also try to avoid the “philanthropy speak,” which has been a nasty habit for far too long in our field. Tony Proscio's writings on the subject — “In Other Words: A Plea for Plain Speaking in Foundations” and “Bad Words for Good,” both published by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation — have been wholeheartedly embraced by our communications team and affirmed the decision we made several years ago to revamp our materials to include language that is simple and approachable. If you think about it, philanthropic communications should be painless, as enjoyable as reading a good book.

By using our varied resources and honing our storytelling skills, we believe our Foundation plays a role in helping grantees provide a rich contribution to public dialogue and increasing awareness among policymakers, the news media and the public-at-large about ways in which Californians' health can be improved.

## PUTTING THE GRANTEEES FIRST

*A foundation's communications resources can bring more resources to the work of grantees and help strengthen their positions as public spokespersons.*

A foundation's communications resources, if used strategically, can bring more attention to the work of grantees and help strengthen their positions as public spokespersons. This communications philosophy guides our work and is closely aligned with our Foundation's mission.

It is a philosophy that puts the grantee before the Foundation — and it is an approach that we prefer to one that emphasizes our staff as the sole experts on health. However, it doesn't mean that we decline requests to address the media or policymakers on health-related issues. We often are called upon to do this and are happy to respond. However, whenever opportunities arise or are cultivated by us to highlight grantees and position them as the experts, we use our communications program to give more "legs" to *their* work.

## WHAT WE MEAN BY "STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS"

*What is the message? To whom is it directed? Why does it need to be sent? How will we get the word out and measure the results?*

When discussing communications with our colleagues, we often share a definition prepared several years ago at a Communications Network conference. The panel featured foundation presidents and was titled "Strategic Communications From the Top Down." It's a plain definition, but we like it because it keeps us thinking clearly about our work:

"Strategic communications is identifying specific messages and information, deciding to whom you will convey them, thinking about why you want to disseminate them to your chosen audiences, selecting how you will get that word out, then measuring the results of the effort."

For our Foundation, this communications approach goes beyond publicity generated through media relations. It's about being clear for whom that publicity is generated and why. It's also about integrating into our program the best from time-honored social marketing approaches that embrace such tactics as paid advertising, direct mail, polling, publications, special collateral material, event sponsorships and underwriting, and media partnerships.

Strategic communications is also about having the sense not to use precious resources to communicate with the media when the target audience can be reached in more effective ways. It's about acknowledging the need for multilingual communications in a state like California that hosts the number-one markets for Spanish-language media and several influential Asian-focused newspaper chains. *Comunicando en español* at The California Wellness Foundation is the rule, not the exception. We keep our target audiences in mind so that if information needs to be appropriately created — not simply translated — we do it. And we do this not just in Spanish, but in various languages, depending on our audiences, for specific outreach efforts.

We also push ourselves to explore new ways of communicating, thanks to fast-paced advancements in technology and the World Wide Web. At the same time, we remain sensitive to the digital divide so that we don't inadvertently leave out audiences with no Internet access or give the information edge to organizations that have Internet access.

Strategic communications is also about being candid when it comes to the use of tactics that sound good but are not effective, and having the courage to stay away from those approaches. An example of one of our "tactics to avoid" is unpaid broadcast public service announcements, which we view as expensive communications to produce that rarely move policy but are often masked institutional branding campaigns primarily designed to generate publicity.

Most important, it comes down to knowing ourselves and taking the initiative to define what our institution does and doesn't do, as well as taking time for constant reflection on how and why we communicate.

## DEFINING OUR AUDIENCES

*Our messages are targeted toward different audiences for specific reasons and take many forms.*

Good stories appeal to different people for different reasons. Similarly, our messages are targeted toward our audiences for specific reasons and take many forms. Listed below are the audiences we have identified as important to us in carrying out our mission and general messages for each audience.

**Potential Applicants.** All foundations live with the unfortunate fact that the need for grant money far outweighs available funds. For this reason, some foundations shy away from publicizing their funding programs too broadly in order to limit the number of requests received. Our approach, especially in recent years, has been exactly the opposite. We follow an "open-door" mindset, encouraging anyone with a worthwhile idea that fits within our mission to apply for funding. While we do not enjoy the unpleasant task of turning away hundreds of worthwhile organizations, we want to be sure that even the smallest, grassroots organizations are given the same opportunity to request grants as the larger organizations that have more resources for researching foundation funding. Our goal is for

organizations working to improve the health of Californians to read about good examples of funded programs, learn our definitions of health, wellness and prevention, and feel welcome to apply by following clearly outlined application instructions.

**Grantees.** Although we tell the stories of our grantees to broader audiences, we believe it is also important for grantees to be aware of each other and the work that is being done throughout California to improve health. Program staff often convenes grantees working in common areas to share ideas, and we are also able to help grantees learn from one another through our communications activities. Our publications and website provide contact information for grantees we have featured. We also share the results of research and evaluations we have funded to contribute to the knowledge base of our grantees.

**Government Agencies.** Public health workers, schoolteachers, parks and recreation directors, city managers and many other valuable government workers make up a large part of our mailing list. These public servants are often on the front lines, along with staff of nonprofit organizations, to help children and families live, work and play in healthy environments. While they are not necessarily responsible for setting policy, they do play an important role in implementing successful programs and advocating on behalf of underserved Californians. It is our goal to share information gleaned from our grantees to help leaders within the government sector improve their services or create new programs.

**Policymakers.** While the stories of our grantees can be heartwarming and inspiring, they also have incredible implications for state and local policies. Issues such as insurance for low-income children and families, advocacy channels for health care consumers, peer outreach programs to prevent teen pregnancy and after-school programs as a violence prevention strategy, have been brought to the attention of policymakers through our communications efforts. Our grantees have solutions, but often lack the resources or the status to be heard. We help provide a conduit for grantees to inform policymakers, who in turn have the opportunity to make policy changes that will improve health throughout the state of California. More examples of our role in funding and communicating public policy efforts can be found in a previous edition of this series titled “Reflections on Public Policy Grantmaking,” authored by TCWF’s Director of Public Policy Ruth Holton.

**News Media.** No one likes a good story as much as a journalist. The challenge is to give the news media stories that not only entertain, but also provide information and perspectives that support our mission. Broadcast and print news outlets have incredible power to inform public opinion, to determine which issues are even worthy of public debate. Through our contacts with the news media, we strive to bring issues affecting the health and wellness of underserved Californians into the forefront of public discussions, with our grantees taking center stage.

**Foundations and Corporate Giving Programs.** A commitment to learning is a core value that all of our staff at TCWF take seriously. In that spirit, we hope to share our lessons learned with our colleagues and learn from other grantmakers as well. Our communications program is a vital piece of that exchange. We not only share lessons learned through this *Reflections* series, but through various publications and our website as well. We provide examples of funding strategies, share results of evaluations and research, and explore topics relevant to philanthropy, such as devolution, cultural diversity, and the value of core operating support. In the long term, we believe this commitment to learning and sharing will result in healthier lives for children and families.

## RESPONDING TO OUR AUDIENCES

*We conducted a communications audit and surveys to find out what information our audiences wanted.*

After we identified our target audiences, we gathered more information about their communications-related needs. To get this in-depth data, we hired an outside communications firm to conduct phone surveys of randomly selected people from our mailing list. We thought it important to rely on a firm with polling and surveying experience to ensure accurate results. The communications firm also interviewed staff and board members.

While we learned that our messages were for the most part reaching our intended audiences, several changes came about as a result of the audit. These included:

- adding a tagline to our materials — Grantmaking for a Healthier California — to help clarify our purpose;
- replacing our numerous program brochures with a single brochure that provides an overview of the Foundation;
- completely overhauling our website, which has since become an up-to-date, useful resource for all of our audiences; and
- creating a uniform “look” — what we call our “signature design” — for all of our materials in a way that would allow our readers to recognize our publications and identify more readily with our messages.

The audit also gave us information regarding our internal processes that we did not expect, nor necessarily wanted to hear. The communications department had then just been established, and some of the program staff was still somewhat unsure of the purpose and role of the communications staff. We learned that we needed to view our fellow staff members as an audience unto itself. Since that time, we have worked to clearly demonstrate the value our department brings to the Foundation's mission and have promoted the philosophy that we are all partners in this work.

## LEGAL REVIEWS IN FOUNDATION COMMUNICATIONS

*It is important to make legal distinctions between Foundation- and grantee-produced information.*

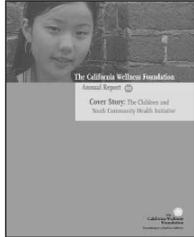
For legal reasons, it is important to make a distinction between information and material produced by our Foundation and those generated by grantees with Foundation funding. Page nine shows two columns: one lists the information produced by our Foundation and the other lists grantee materials. Legally our Foundation must review and handle the information differently, particularly when our name is included in grantees' policy and advocacy efforts.

Our Foundation legally owns all electronic and published information produced or commissioned by us with nongrant dollars and that bear our name and logo. We are legally responsible for its content and, therefore, have internal policies in place to conduct legal reviews. This information includes: our brochure; newsletter *Portfolio*; [www.tcdf.org](http://www.tcdf.org); *Reflections* series; news releases printed on our letterhead; print or broadcast advertisements purchased as media buys directly by the Foundation; commissioned polls, surveys and evaluations; and commissioned video productions.

Why the legal reviews? Most of our Foundation-produced materials tell the stories of grantees and their work, and this translates into real people and real issues, some of them controversial, sensitive or heart-wrenching. We take great care to accurately present their lives with dignity and communicate with clarity the complex issues they address. We also write about grantees' work in some areas that are inherently controversial. For example, we have written about grantees that address the role of guns in perpetrating violence against youth, and have shared information about organizations that promote responsible access to contraceptives among teens to prevent unplanned pregnancies. We also conduct legal reviews to make sure we do not inadvertently misrepresent issues and to make clear that the Foundation's role is strictly that of a funder without legal responsibility for grantees' activities.

# Examples of Communications Efforts That Accent Grantees of The California Wellness Foundation

## Produced by TCWF



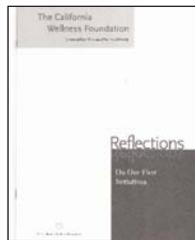
Annual Report



Portfolio



www.tcwf.org



Reflections



Media Relations

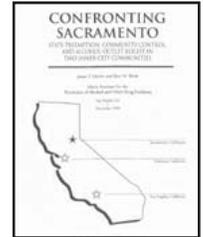


Meetings Convened by TCWF



Advertising

## By TCWF Grantees



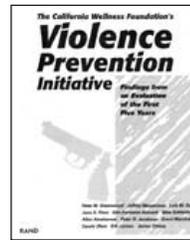
Policy Briefs



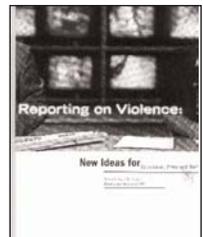
Reports and Surveys



Grantee Websites



Evaluations



Resource Guides



Public Education Campaigns



Conferences

## Shared Strategic Audiences

Prospective Grantees

Grantees

Former Grantees

Community Leaders

Health Experts

Policymakers

News Media

Elected Officials

Government Employees

Academia, Education

Foundations, Corporations

Consultants, Evaluators

However, when it comes to disseminating materials that the grantees themselves produce, which include briefing information, advocacy materials or public education campaigns, the role of the Foundation's legal review is different. The Foundation often funds organizations to address health-related public policy issues, and this has included funding advocacy groups to speak on behalf of underserved populations on access to health care, for example. Such information produced by the grantee is owned by the grantee, not the Foundation, so we do not conduct legal reviews or content editing when only our funding credit is mentioned.

If the grantee asks us for permission to include our name, logo and Foundation information, or to quote Foundation board or staff in its materials, then the information must go through our Foundation's legal review process before the grantee can release it. We do not edit the grantee's information, however, because we could assume liability for its content. However, upon reviewing the information and how we are represented, we reserve the right to decline its use of our name, logo and quotes of TCWF staff in its materials if we believe it is not consistent with our mission or is inappropriately presented. If we find that information on the Foundation is inaccurate, we can correct it without assuming liability for the grantee-produced information. But our information is the only content we edit.

## PUBLICATIONS

*Our publications' content serves as the backbone of our communications program.*

As with most organizations, our publications are the “backbone” of our communications program. Our newsletter, *Portfolio*, is produced several times a year and provides up-to-date information and stories about our grantees, as well as a standing “How To Apply” section and a grants listing. We also publish an annual report that provides an overview of the year's activities and an in-depth, journalistically written cover story that explores topics relevant to our work.

All of our target audiences are included in our readership, but we often repackage or expand upon the information, when appropriate, to more specifically target one audience or another. A good example is a story that appeared in *Portfolio* in January 1999 about *Organización en California de Lideres Campesinas*, a grantee that educates farmworkers about the dangers of pesticides. When the state of California commemorated its first Cesar Chavez holiday in March 2001, we updated and repackaged the story for English- and Spanish-language news media. Because of its timeliness, the story received tremendous coverage for the grantee and the health problems associated with pesticides among farmworkers.

Another Foundation publication is our *Reflections* series, which has no standard schedule but is published as topics arise that are appropriate to share with one or more of our audiences. The mailing list for each *Reflections* piece is different, depending on the topic. In most cases, we are primarily concerned with sharing lessons learned with other foundations, but grantees, policymakers and government agencies may also receive issues within the series.

## WEBSITE & ELECTRONIC DISSEMINATION

*The design of the website follows the same philosophy as our entire communications program—it focuses on the grantees.*

In the mid-1990s, as the Internet became more widely used among our constituents, we were faced with integrating electronic communications into what was primarily a print-driven communications program. Similar to many organizations' first attempts at creating websites, our early website consisted of our publications that were posted to the site "as is."

We soon learned that writing for the Internet required a different mindset than writing for publications. People want to get to information quickly and easily navigate their way through the many documents we post. We are also mindful of people who do not have access to the Internet, and we take great pains not to post information that would give any applicant an "edge" over an organization without online access. At the same time, we recognize the potential for the website to provide information, such as evaluations and a comprehensive grants database, that is not practical to provide in print.

Our goal is for our print publications and our website to reinforce each other. This is accomplished on the one hand by using the website to post publications in a user-friendly format. On the other hand, we use our publications to advertise new features on our website. We have also found that we reach a wider audience and save money by mailing out postcards that direct people to our website for new online publications. Lastly, we allow people to sign up for electronic notification — we call them e-postcards — that will alert them to new publications on the website.

The design of the website itself follows the same philosophy as our entire communications program. We define our audiences and target our messages toward those audiences. But the website differs from our print publications in one way: it must be relevant for all of our audiences. With print publications, we can decide who is on each mailing list, but with the website we cannot control who visits and when. What we can do is direct different audiences to the information they need quickly. For example, we have a newsroom intended specifically for the news media. We also have a section titled "*En Español*" for Spanish-language news media. Potential grantees, on the other hand, can easily access information about grant programs and application instructions. Government and

nonprofit leaders, as well as policymakers, can also find evaluations and lessons learned to help inform their decisions about best practices and model programs. We are also mindful of the digital divide and have a strict policy to post information during the same period when Foundation publications are scheduled to be delivered by mail. By directing our website visitors to the information they need, we are striving to engage them in our mission in ways that are relevant to their work.

## **MEDIA RELATIONS AND MEDIA PARTNERSHIPS**

*We don't stop using strategic communications when it comes to reaching out to multilingual news media.*

The first question we always ask ourselves when contemplating a news release is: “Is this a legitimate news item or a solid feature story?” If the answer is “no,” then we think about disseminating that information using other Foundation communications vehicles, such as the “What’s New” sections found on [www.tcwf.org](http://www.tcwf.org) and in *Portfolio*.

Announcements on our grant awards are rarely handled with news releases; they are publicized through our newsletter and website. We issue news releases on grants only when there is a major change to our overall grantmaking program or a significant amount of funding made to a specific area. We know that journalists generally do not perceive grants or philanthropy as news, unless there is a major amount of money awarded by larger-than-life philanthropists such as Ted Turner or Bill Gates.

Contrary to perceptions of our Foundation, we don’t send out a lot of news releases each year, yet many of our grantees receive significant news coverage. We believe this is because we are selective about the use of this communications tactic and because our stories have been picked up by local news media markets from our journalistically written newsletter and website.

When we do reach out to journalists, it typically involves more than a simple English-language news release to the major outlets. An example of our media relations program is the announcement of the Foundation’s Violence Prevention Initiative California Peace Prize, which has been awarded annually to three unsung heroes who have successfully prevented violence in their communities. Each honoree receives \$25,000. We assertively approach local and statewide news media to promote the California Peace Prize honorees, and they garner tremendous coverage. Not only is the coverage secured for the individuals, but also for key messages from our Violence Prevention Initiative — namely that violence is a public health problem that is preventable and that individuals can and do make a difference in saving people’s lives.

We don't stop thinking about strategic communications when it comes to integrating multilingual news media relations in our outreach. For our Foundation, news media relations outreach in California has to address multilingual media — period. In fact, depending upon the story we are pushing to journalists, it can often mean we think first in non-English languages, then we figure out the angle for so-called “general market” media.

For example, one of our California Peace Prize honorees was a Cambodian-American who left the killing fields of Southeast Asia only to encounter violence against Asian youth in Orange County. We worked with our Asian communications firm to make sure that the honoree's work and the concepts of violence being a public health problem and preventable were culturally and linguistically appropriate in the materials we prepared. We did not simply do a literal translation of what we created for the general market media. We also relied on our communications firm's expertise to guide us in more than a translation of words. We wanted to make sure our ads, news releases and website information helped amplify the voices of our honorees' advocacy efforts in a way that was meaningful to the community he served. It was also important to make sure the information in Cambodian was approved by the honoree, since he would live with its impact long after our communications efforts were finished.

California is home to some of the most influential media organizations in the country. Los Angeles' top-rated television station is KMEX, the flagship of national Spanish-language network *Univision*. For several years now, the station has consistently received higher ratings than the English-language stations. There are more than 200 newspapers in our state that reach the Asian/Pacific Islander audience, making California home to the largest number of Asian newspapers (Hawaii previously had this distinction). And radio aimed at youth, often with formats that represent the contemporary urban hip-hop music created by African-Americans, represents an important force in communicating with youth of all colors.

The sheer concentration of diverse media has also spawned important journalism associations in our state that have influenced national media. This past year, we piloted a media partnership program with the objective of identifying key journalism organizations and print, broadcast and Internet media to highlight the work of our grantees in ways that go beyond news media relations. These partnerships involve using administrative dollars from the communications department's budget to underwrite the participation of the Foundation's grantees in specific media events and conferences, special news productions and print sections, or ongoing news/feature coverage of topics that are aligned with the Foundation's funding areas and mission. We have already seen an impressive number of grantees secure coverage for their programs or be positioned as future contacts for journalists to pursue. Examples of these partnerships follow.

The *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Health attracts more than 65,000 attendees. The Foundation underwrites three grantees to set up a booth to provide health information and/or screenings to the public. We place a print advertisement in the *Times*' special health supplement, link to its website, and send news releases to encourage festival attendance from organizations, many of which are our grantees.

The ABC-affiliate **KGTV** in San Diego has produced documentaries for the past several years on violence prevention, the uninsured and mental health. Our Foundation partners with the San Diego-based Alliance Health Care Foundation to underwrite the television station's presentation of the programs, which also feature call-ins, website links to [www.tcwf.org](http://www.tcwf.org) and printed materials available to the public.

**New California Media** (NCM) is a statewide organization that represents alternative and ethnic media in the state. The Foundation co-sponsors the group, along with other funders such as the Ford Foundation, to present a major conference attracting more than 1,000 journalists representing ethnic, alternative and general market media. The Foundation worked with NCM to present a panel on environmental health that included journalists, a Foundation grantee and our program director who oversees this funding area.

Berkeley-based **Youth Radio**, a recent Peabody award winner, received underwriting support from the Foundation to establish a Los Angeles-based pilot program aimed at identifying at-risk youth to train them to become radio producers. The programs are aired on public radio and often feature health topics or issues, such as violence and foster care, that can affect the health of youth.

The **California Chicano News Media Association** (CCNMA) is the nation's oldest Latino media organization that later founded the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. Based at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communications, most of CCNMA's 800-plus statewide members work for California's key general market and Latino media. We co-presented with the association a panel of journalists that focused on media gatekeepers and the news judgment they exercise when it comes to covering violence and youth of color. The Foundation arranged for one of our grantees, the Berkeley Media Studies Group, to participate in the panel and share its report titled "Reporting on Violence: New Ideas for Television, Print and Web."

Los Angeles-based **La Opinion** is the nation's largest Spanish-language daily newspaper. The Foundation has placed ads in the paper's health supplement to highlight health promotion efforts of TCWF grantees, such as the nonprofit *Las Memorias*/Strike Out AIDS Project, and its partnership with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

## ADVERTISING

*We shy away from ads that focus solely on "branding" our institution — rather, we use advertising to further policy and health issues.*

The Foundation uses advertising as part of strategic communications through two methods: we buy advertising directly from the media, and we collaborate with select grantees that place advertisements as part of the funding they receive for public education campaigns that include our name. While the communications department is involved in both efforts, this edition of *Reflections* will focus on the first method. (More

information on our advertising funded through public education campaigns can be found in “Reflections on Public Policy Grantmaking” available on our website.)

Advertisements placed in print or broadcast media directly by the Foundation are legally owned by the Foundation, and as such, we follow procedures to ensure the content is accurate and appropriately consistent with our Foundation’s mission. We use advertisements to announce Foundation awards, such as the California Peace Prize, or other efforts that highlight the work of grantees, such as our partnership with the *Los Angeles Times* Festival of Health.

We shy away from “branding” ads that focus solely on positioning our institution or an issue strictly for informational purposes. Our ads are part of an overall strategy that highlights grantees with the intent of drawing more public attention to their work on the issues or policies they are advancing to create change. As is the case with media relations and our website, some ads are prepared in Spanish or other languages and placed in media that reach a target audience that will be interested in the ad’s message and its call to action. In most cases, such advertisements are part of a comprehensive effort that includes media relations, Internet communications and direct mail to policymakers, thereby strengthening the messages that communicate the work of our grantees.

## COMMUNICATIONS COLLABORATIONS WITH GRANTEES

*Opportunities often arise to amplify grantees' messages that are aligned with our mission.*

In addition to our publications, website, media relations and advertising, other opportunities often arise to amplify grantees’ messages that are aligned with our mission. These activities range from providing a cover letter from our CEO for a grantee-published report, to lending our name to grantees’ public education campaigns. These are special efforts that in some instances require significant staff time.

For example, when a public education campaign bears our name, we are involved from the initial strategy meetings, to reviewing all of the materials, to measuring and publishing the results.

An example of a much smaller effort is a report recently prepared by a grantee about the benefits of peer counseling as a teenage pregnancy prevention strategy. While we were not involved in the creation of the report, we did mail it to policymakers and other community leaders with a cover letter from our CEO to give the report more weight and amplify the grantee's message. The decision to proceed with such opportunities is analyzed on a case-by-case basis, using alignment with our mission, relevance to our audiences and availability of resources and staff time as our guides.

## MEASURING OUR IMPACT

*We wanted to know if our communications program added value to the work of grantees.*

We employ several tools to track the effectiveness of our communications program:

**Grantee Survey** – Every three years, we work with a consultant to survey grantees and those declined for funding to gauge their perception of the Foundation's grantmaking and communications program as well as to receive feedback on how they were treated by Foundation staff. This has

resulted in a wealth of information that we use to refine or revamp our published and electronic information. Examples of feedback (provided in parenthesis) from the most recent survey spawned the following changes:

- We adopted more accessible language (“make it more user-friendly”).
- The Foundation refined its signature design (“you look like an HMO”).
- Our website was redesigned (“it takes too many clicks to find the information”).
- We created documents to fill voids of information, such as adapting the website's “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) section to create our first-ever published FAQ sheet for those without Internet access, which significantly reduced calls to our Foundation's main telephone line (“what do you fund?”).

The questionnaire and an unedited executive summary, including both positive and negative feedback from the most recent survey, can be found on our website. We placed it on the Internet because we believed it was important to share the feedback with those who participated, as well as with the field of philanthropy and general public.

**Postcard & Website Surveys** – Once a year, we mail postcards to update our mailing list, encourage more individuals to access our documents online, and announce opportunities to receive e-mail alerts on our grantmaking programs. We also provide a space on the postcard to ask for open-ended feedback on our published and electronic materials. The information is assessed and, where possible, modifications or refinements are made to better serve our audiences. Likewise, we have a general e-mail address for people to provide us with comments. A more formal website survey is being designed for implementation in the near future.

**Evaluation of Communications Program** – We are considering the possibility of conducting a formal evaluation of our communications program to calculate the overall impact of our strategic communications efforts. We plan to look beyond measuring the column inches of newspaper articles or gross impressions of our advertisements. We want to know the following: Has our communications program added value to the work of grantees? Helped them secure greater attention from the public and media to the issues they address? Helped them attract more resources for their programs?

## CONCLUSIONS

*Considerable time and resources have been devoted to building the department's infrastructure and creating a strategy that supports our Foundation's mission.*

The Foundation's communications department was created in 1996, four years after the Foundation was founded. Since then, a considerable amount of time and resources have been devoted to building the department's infrastructure and creating a strategy that supports our Foundation's mission.

Many of the Foundation's early tactics were print-driven because of the strong writing skills and journalism backgrounds of its communications staff. However, our greatest challenge the past few years has been learning about and responding to the explosive technological advancements of the 1990s. In the coming years, we will continue to explore ways to make technology a stronger component of our overall communications program without inadvertently short-changing audiences who are not yet wired. We are also keeping an eye on integrating more effective strategies to reach multilingual audiences.

Below are some of the key lessons we have learned during the past six years:

**Keep all communications focused on the Foundation’s mission statement.** Use it as a litmus test to determine if new ideas are deserving of a place in your communications program.

**Become good storytellers.** The best way to get your messages across is through the stories of your grantees.

**Think strategically.** This means knowing your messages, your audiences and their languages, your tactics — and always measuring your impact.

**Research your audiences and communicate to them** in ways that will help them become partners in pursuit of your mission.

**Hire good firms and consultants** who specialize in the tactics you will use and inspire them to work collaboratively with communications staff and each other.

**Give equal weight to the expertise of ethnic communications firms** and don’t treat them as “translators” for general market firms.

**Tailor your efforts to reach your intended audiences,** but also look at the big picture to be sure that all of your communications activities are integrated and reinforce one another.

**Take advantage of special opportunities to advance your mission** through direct mail, media partnerships or public education campaigns, working in collaboration with your grantees.

One commitment remains the same: our Foundation will continue to strengthen our storytelling to better communicate the work of grantees who are dedicated to improving the health of Californians.

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*Magdalena Beltrán-del Olmo is the vice president of communications for The California Wellness Foundation, which is nationally recognized in the field of philanthropy for its strategic communications program and public education campaigns. Beltrán-del Olmo has more than 20 years professional experience in journalism, communications management and social marketing. Before joining the Foundation in 1996, Beltrán-del Olmo was a director of public affairs and communications for Kaiser Permanente in the Los Angeles area. Prior to that, she was vice president at Coronado Communications — a firm specializing in social marketing — where she oversaw public education, entertainment and corporate accounts, including the national, multilingual, multimedia public education campaign for the 1986 immigration amnesty legalization and the California tobacco education campaign. As associate director with the USC-based California Chicano News Media Association (CCNMA) in the 1980s, she developed the nation's first computerized job referral service for ethnic journalists in the news media, helping more than 300 professionals and students be hired by major news media organizations across the country. She worked with CCNMA to help found the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.*

*Beltrán-del Olmo has worked as a newspaper reporter with the Orange County Register and Gannett-owned Salinas Californian. She has received numerous awards for her communications and advocacy work, among them a national recognition for a public broadcasting program on domestic violence, several Public Relations Society of America's PRISM awards and five nods from the Council on Foundations and Communications Network to receive their highest award for communications excellence, the Wilmer Shields Rich Award. Beltrán-del Olmo is a member of the Communications Network board of directors and the Council on Foundations' communications committee. She volunteers her communications expertise for the Cure Autism Now Foundation. She graduated in 1982 with degrees in journalism and Mexican-American studies from California State University, Northridge (CSUN), where she received the Outstanding Graduate in Journalism award from the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi. She was inducted in Kappa Tau Alpha, the national honor society for journalism and mass communications.*

*Roni Hooper is a former communications officer with The California Wellness Foundation and currently contributes as a writer and editor of TCWF publications. During her five years at the Foundation, she worked closely with the vice president of communications to set up and manage the department. She oversaw the Foundation's printed communications materials, including the annual report, quarterly newsletter, the Reflections series and press materials. She also contributed to the implementation and evaluation of the Foundation's overall strategic plan. Before joining the Foundation, Hooper volunteered as a teacher and fundraising consultant for Children of the Street Welfare Association (CHISWEA) in Tanzania, East Africa for one year. While in Tanzania, she held regular classes for street children, consulted with CHISWEA's board of directors on its strategic plan and helped raise money for a newly constructed center that serves about 50 street children daily. She worked previously with Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois as manager of public information, where she produced semiannual newsletters, annual reports, press releases and fundraising appeals, and managed a database of 25,000 donors. Her background also includes child care work for abused and neglected children at Lutherbrook Children's Center in Addison, Illinois. Hooper received her bachelor's degree in religion from California Lutheran University in 1989, and her master's degree in public administration from the University of Southern California in 2000. She is a member of the Communications Network and Women in Philanthropy affinity groups of the Council on Foundations. She also works as program manager of the parenting education program of Interface Children Family Services in Camarillo, California.*

## INFORMATION AND SOURCES ON COMMUNICATIONS

The following publications, organizations and agencies have contributed to the thinking behind The California Wellness Foundation's multilingual communications program. In addition, resources have been listed below for funders who are interested in building or supporting the strategic communications capacity of their grantees. Lastly, we have listed the long-time communications consultants of the Foundation who have helped shape our communications program.

### Resources for Foundation Communications Programs

"All American: How to Cover Asian America," published by the Asian American Journalists Association ([www.aaaja.org](http://www.aaaja.org)) in cooperation with South Asian Journalists Association ([www.saja.org](http://www.saja.org)).

"Bad Words for Good (How Foundations Garble Their Message and Lose Their Audience)" by Tony Proscio, published by Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

Communications Network, an affinity group of the Council on Foundations, which offers various conferences and workshops, can be accessed by visiting [www.comnetwork.org](http://www.comnetwork.org).

"Covering L.A.'s Majority" by Diana Martinez and Andres Chavez, published by the Interethnic Media Task Force, County of Los Angeles.

"Five Myths About Branding" by Andy Goodman. Available online at [www.agoodmanonline.com](http://www.agoodmanonline.com).

"Grantmakers Communications Manual" by Christopher McNamara, published by the Council on Foundations.

"In Other Words: A Plea for Plain Speaking in Foundations," by Tony Proscio, published by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

"Learning From Communications Practices at Leading Foundations," by the Foundation Strategy Group, LLC, available online at [www.foundationstrategy.com](http://www.foundationstrategy.com).

"Minorities and Media: Diversity and the End of Mass Communications" by Clint C. Wilson II and Felix Gutierrez, published by Sage Publications.

"Overcoming the Jitters - The Uneasy Relationship Between Philanthropy and the Media and Ways to Improve It," a research study for the Urban Institute Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy.

"Strategies for Shaping Public Policy: A Guide for Health Funders," published by Grantmakers in Health (GIH).

"Tips for Developing a Strategic Communications Plan that Accents the Work of Foundation Grantees," a training manual used at Grantmakers In Health, Communications Network, Council on Foundations and other conferences, by Magdalena Beltran-del Olmo, printed by The California Wellness Foundation.

"We 'Get' It: Four Foundation Presidents Explain Their Thinking About Strategic Communications" by Darlene Siska, *Foundation News and Commentary*, January/February 1999. From a Communications Network panel featuring Ed Kacic, Elizabeth Locke, Barry Munitz and Gary Yates.

### Communications Resources to Share with Foundation Grantees

"Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention" by Lawrence Wallack, Lori Dorfman, David Jernigan, Makani Themba, published by Sage Publications.

"News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working With the Media" by Lawrence Wallack, Katie Woodruff, Lori Dorfman, Makani Themba-Nixon, and Iris Diaz, published by Berkeley Media Studies Group.

"Now Hear This - The Nine Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications," published by Fenton Communications.

"Promoting Issues and Ideas: A Guide to Public Relations For Nonprofit Organizations" by M. Booth & Associates, Inc., published by The Foundation Center.

"The Sixty-Second Guide to Working Effectively With the News Media," a pamphlet by the Independent Sector. Available online at [www.independentsector.org](http://www.independentsector.org).

"Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Organizations: Seven Steps to Creating a Successful Plan" by Janet M. Radtke, published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

"Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes and How to Ensure They Won't Happen to Yours" by Cause Communications and Andy Goodman.

[www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org), a media technical assistance effort regarding public interest advocacy designed to develop the capacity of grassroots groups to shape public opinion and garner positive media attention.

### The California Wellness Foundation Long-time Communications Consultants

**Hershey Associates** - Strategic design and annual reports ([www.hersheyassociates.com](http://www.hersheyassociates.com)).

**i.e. communications** - Strategic communications and media relations ([www.iecomm.org](http://www.iecomm.org)).

**IW Group** - Strategic advertising and media relations specific to Asian and Pacific Islander communities ([www.iwgc.org](http://www.iwgc.org)).

**Mansfield + Associates** - Website strategy and design services ([www.mans.com](http://www.mans.com)).

**Quon Design** - Graphic design (Mark Quon, Quon Design, 10960 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1750, Los Angeles, CA 90024).

**Valencia, Perez and Echeveste** - Strategic advertising and media relations specific to Latino communities ([www.vpepr.com](http://www.vpepr.com)).