

# Is This Your Last Issue?

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Since launching free-range thinking™ in August 1999, I have intended for this publication to stimulate a conversation about the way our sector communicates. Each month, I profile best practices and resources that can help you reach more people more effectively, and I welcome your feedback, story ideas, and even the occasional flame. At barest minimum, though, I ask readers to check in once each year to let me know they're alive, well, and still interested in receiving regular visits from the grazing cows.

*Keep Me On!*

So if you'd like to remain on the mailing list, please send an email to [andy@agoodmanonline.com](mailto:andy@agoodmanonline.com) with the message "Keep Me On." (You can simply enter those words in the subject line and skip the message, because if the email bears your name I'll have all the information I need.) If you cannot send email, just call 213.386.9501, say "Keep me on!" and leave your full name. Thanks (in advance) for taking a few moments to check in, and I look forward to continuing our conversation in the months to come.

Andy Goodman  
Editor & Publisher



Free-range thinking™ is a monthly newsletter for public interest groups, foundations, and progressive businesses that want to reach more people more effectively. For a free subscription, send your request to: [andy@agoodmanonline.com](mailto:andy@agoodmanonline.com) or call 213.386.9501. Back issues are available on the web at [www.agoodmanonline.com](http://www.agoodmanonline.com).

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## Reports That Make Reporters Report

As state is sending its greenest teachers to its poorest schools where they are paid disproportionately less than other teachers. The wage gap isn't readily apparent, however, because salaries in this state are reported at the *district* level, which means inequities among individual schools can remain hidden. Fortunately, a crusading nonprofit digs out the real numbers, releases them in a report, and journalists jump on the story. Within months, legislation is moving through the state legislature to rectify the problem.

This is essentially what happened earlier this year when The Education Trust West, an Oakland-based nonprofit, released its eye-opening report, "California's Hidden

Teachers Spending Gap." But most nonprofits will readily concede that their reports rarely generate such positive results. What did EdTrust West do right that other nonprofits often get wrong?

Fenton Communications, a public interest communications firm, has spent more than 20 years helping groups craft reports that attract media attention. Fenton has scored successes with clients from the American Lung Association to Harvard University to, most recently, EdTrust West. In August, Robert Pérez and Lisa Chen of Fenton neatly condensed more than two decades of lessons learned into a report of their own, "In a Study

Released Today...: 10 Tips to Get More Ink on Your Next Report." It's free, it's must reading, and it's previewed inside.



Before releasing your organization's next report, consider some advice based on 20+ years experience in the field.

► “The biggest mistake nonprofits make,” says Pérez, “is thinking they’re doing a reporter a huge favor by giving them a 100-page report a day before the story breaks. They seem to be thinking the reporter is sitting at his or her desk, just waiting for the phone to ring.”

In August, Fenton conducted a salon in San Francisco in which journalists spoke directly

to nonprofits about reports, candidly sharing what got their attention, what didn’t, and why. According to Pérez, Alex Barnum, who covers science and the environment for *The San Francisco Chronicle*, captured the mood of the room. “He said he gets sent so many reports that he’s looking for excuses to get rid of them,” Pérez recalls. “If a report’s difficult to read, poorly framed, lacks an executive summary or doesn’t provide enough lead time to work with, Barnum said it was easier for him to set it aside.”

In preparing their ten tips, Pérez says that he and co-author Chen had three audiences in mind: researchers who want recommendations on how to better frame the findings in their report or study, communications staffers who are seeking the biggest bang for their buck when their report is released, and foundation officers who frequently work with grantees that issue reports.

“In a Study Released Today...: 10 Tips to Get More

Ink on Your Next Report” can be downloaded for free at Fenton Communications’ web site, [www.fenton.com](http://www.fenton.com). But for those of you who just can’t wait, here’s a quick overview of the ten tips—along with a strong recommendation that you download the entire report and get the full story behind each tip.

- 1. Framing is everything.** How well you frame your report can determine how the media covers your story and how much play it gets.
- 2. “If it bleeds, it leads. If it cries, it flies.”** News stories that make the cut often contain an element of surprise or controversy.
- 3. Be at the right place at the right time.** Choosing a compelling calendar hook can help amplify your report’s main messages.
- 4. Go local!** If you want to make the local news, make sure your report offers local-level data. In other words, to play in Peoria, it’s got to have news for Peoria.
- 5. Put a face on your numbers.** Bring your data to life with human interest stories.
- 6. Don’t hesitate to point the finger.** Use the media as a spotlight to put public pressure on decision makers.
- 7. Make the report reader-friendly.** Think of your executive summary as the “CliffsNotes” to your report for journalists under deadline.
- 8. Build broad-based support for your recommendations.** When it comes to shifting the debate,

**A**re you fighting for living wages, affordable health care, or equitable development? Are you fighting against national big-box retailers such as Wal-Mart who are wreaking havoc locally? If you’re working in the economic justice arena, the SPIN Project and The Tides Foundation have combined to produce a handbook especially for you.

*Words That Work: Messaging for Economic Justice* profiles successful communications and framing strategies that have already yielded gains for advocates like you working around the U.S. To download a free copy, visit [www.spinproject.org](http://www.spinproject.org).

And if you haven’t visited their recently revamped site in a while, stick around and click around—it’s chock full of excellent resources for public interest communicators in all arenas.

### Words That Work: Messaging for Economic Justice

the messenger can be as important as the message.

**9. Give reporters enough lead time.** Reporters aren’t waiting by the phone for your call. Make the job easier by giving them advance notice—and the report—well ahead of time.

**10. Hit the editorial pages.** The editorial page is prime real estate for reaching opinion leaders. ■

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## #7 Make the report reader-friendly.

Think of your executive summary as the “CliffsNotes” to your report for journalists under deadline.

Make your report easy to scan, especially for reporters on deadline. An executive summary in particular gives them a useful “CliffsNotes” version of your report so they can get a quick snapshot and decide whether to read further.

**Developing a brief executive summary:** The executive summary should be no more than two to three pages long. It should give reporters an abbreviated overview of key findings and recommendations, an explanation of what makes the report unique (think “first,” “most comprehensive,” and other superlatives), as well as a brief description of your methodology. If your report includes technical language and jargon, you should consider assigning a member of your communications staff to write the executive summary.

**Shorter is sweeter:** Resist the temptation to throw in everything but the kitchen sink. Think of the summary as the document that a harried reporter on deadline reads when he or she doesn’t have time to read the entire report. The essential messages you want headlining your news coverage should be the focus of your summary.

**Break up blocks of text:** In the body of your report, be liberal with headers and sub-headers that will help reporters index findings when they return to the study to pull out key points. Pull-quotes and graphic representations of your numerical findings can also help you emphasize points while offering visual flair.



### Case in Point: The Status of Women in Post-War Iraq

How are Iraqi women faring in the post-war reconstruction period? What are their most pressing needs and hopes for the future?

These were the questions Women for Women International set out to answer in their report, “Windows of Opportunity: The Pursuit of Gender Equality in Post-War Iraq.”

To help reporters wrap their heads around the lengthy report, which included the results of a 35-question household survey of 1,000 Iraqi women, Women for Women International drafted a two-page executive

summary. The summary briefly set up the backdrop for the findings: ongoing violence, societal restrictions, yet optimism in the wake of Saddam Hussein’s oppressive regime.

It also highlighted the report’s “take away” messages: Iraqi women overwhelmingly identified legal rights for women and their right to vote as their two primary concerns on the Iraqi national agenda. Mindful not to bury key findings with too many numbers, Women for Women highlighted just seven survey results in the executive summary with bold subheads so reporters could zoom in on them easily.