



## DIGITAL 101: Theory of Change

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Often, crafting the digital strategy for your organization or campaign can feel like taking a shot in the dark. In many of the other components of our campaign structure — such as field or earned media — strategies are built on years of best practices and real-world application. Digital, on the other hand, is a newly evolving field — and it may not always be clear exactly how digital tools and an effective digital strategy can help your organization or campaign reach your goals.

But just like any other program in your campaign, digital has one primary purpose: To strengthen your organization by helping you reach your goals. A powerful digital program is rooted in the same organizing principles that your organization is already likely using to guide your other programs: Intentional, strategic organizing with a focus on relationship building—and results.

Take a step back for a moment and think about how a Field Organizer should approach relationship-building with your organization's volunteer base. When an organizer calls through a list of volunteers, for instance, they are calling with intention: A strong ask, backed up with clear, compelling urgency. They would never call through a list of volunteers with no ask, simply because it had been a couple weeks since they had been contacted by your organization. Why? Because that would be detrimental to the long-term relationship building that is so key to building a strong field program.

Your digital program is no different. An effective digital program isn't about sending an email once a week because you think you have to — just like your field program is about more than randomly calling through a list of volunteers. It's about ensuring your digital communications, from email to social media, are intentional and strategic so that you build relationships and trust with your supporter base by offering clear opportunities to take meaningful action that drives real results.

Every email, every social media post is part of a larger narrative. And when every digital communication is rooted in urgency and intention — while providing an easy way to take an impactful action — your supporters, over time, trust that what you are sending them is important. They know that you aren't just sending them an email because it's been two weeks since they've heard from you. You're sending an email because there is an opportunity (or a problem), it's urgent and they can contribute by taking the action you ask them to take.

A digital program that reflects a firm commitment to intentionality and action-oriented results is sustainable and will bolster every other facet of your organization, resulting in a more identified supporters, more money raised, more volunteers in the door and more constituent contacts to lawmakers.

As you develop your digital calendar, apply the four-step process of the Theory of Change — an organizing methodology you've likely already applied in other areas of your work—to each component of your plan. When applied long-term, the Theory of Change fosters relationship building with your online universe of supporters, ensuring you're getting the results you need from your digital program.

**ASK YOURSELF:** How does the action we are asking people to take create the change we want to see?

**1. Find your moment:** What is your reason for sending this email right now, at this very moment? What is the problem that supporters can help you solve? What is the opportunity? Every outgoing piece of digital communication—particularly email—should identify why right now is a key moment for your organization/campaign.

- **Examples:**

- Committee hearing scheduled on your legislation
- Legislative session begins in 1 week
- Hostile legislator introduces a bad amendment
- Rally is scheduled at the Statehouse next week
- Partner organization will match all donations for the next 48 hours

**2. Create a sense of urgency:** In the digital sphere, you have 30 seconds (if you're lucky!) to grab supporters' attention and compel them to take action. That means it's not enough to just identify your "moment"—you have to explain why it's so crucial that they take action right now, this very minute. The stakes are high, so make sure your supporters hear that message loud and clear.

- **Examples:**

- "There are only 48 hours left until the Senate Judiciary Committee decides the fate of legislation protecting LGBT people in our state from discrimination."
- "The only way lawmakers will advance a non-discrimination bill this year is if we flood their inboxes in the next seven days before legislative session begins."
- "If this amendment passes, it could allow any individual or business to discriminate against LGBT people—and now we only have a matter of days to stop it."
- "Our rally next week is the only way we can send a clear message that the people of our state overwhelmingly believe it's time to pass a comprehensive LGBT non-discrimination law."

- “Raising \$5,000 by midnight tomorrow is the only way we can buy enough TV airtime to go head-to-head with our opponents deceitful ads”

**3. Provide a solution with a role for your supporter:** You’ve identified your moment and explained why it’s so urgent. Now your supporter is wondering, “How can I help?” Each email should offer a meaningful way supporters can take action that clearly helps solve the moment and urgency you’ve already identified.

- **Examples:**

- “Messaging your legislator right now is the surest way you can help make sure the Senate Judiciary Committee passes the non-discrimination bill next week.”
- “You can help keep up the pressure right now, before the legislative session begins, by contacting your lawmakers today.”
- “Together, we can stop this amendment by contacting the Committee Chair to let her know that the people of our state oppose this shameful attempt to allow for discrimination against LGBT people.”
- “By signing up now to attend next week’s rally at the Statehouse, you’re helping to build the movement we need to pass this critical legislation.”
- “If 100 supporters pitch in \$5 or more right now, we’ll raise enough money to cover our final TV ad buy.

**4. Ask!** The most important and seemingly obvious step is often times the most overlooked. Now that you’ve identified your moment, underscored why it’s urgent, and explained how your supporters can help — it’s time to ask them to take action! Remember: It’s increasingly difficult to hold someone’s attention online — and if a supporter is given multiple options, they will likely choose none of the above. You should always limit yourself to one high-priority ask.

- **Examples:**

- “Tell members of the Senate Judiciary Committee: Pass SB1 next week! Click here to send a message now.”
- “Urge lawmakers: When session begins next week, act quickly to protect LGBT people in our state from discrimination. Click here to send a message.”
- “Click here to rush a message to Committee Chair Smith, urging her to not bring this harmful amendment up for a vote.”
- “Will you join hundreds of supporters from across the state at our rally next Tuesday? Click here to let us know you’ll be there.”
- “Can you help us reach this goal before midnight tomorrow? Pitch in \$5 now and your donation will be doubled.