
Planning for Media Advocacy

The Praxis Project
www.thepraxisproject.org

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Planning for Media Advocacy

Every media strategy must have a clear goal, target audience, message, and a sense of how you would evaluate success.

1. **What is your goal?** The ultimate goal of most media advocacy campaigns is usually some kind of specific policy change; however, campaigns can accomplish a great deal on other fronts along the way.

Short-term goals

- Help increase funding for community advocacy to address the issues raised in the documentary series
- Attract media coverage for the screening or other event that highlights your goal for policy change.

Longer-term goals

- Establish good relationships with the local media, as a basis for future campaigns
- Undermine the credibility of those opposing one's policy goal

2. **Who is your target audience?** The target audience affects everything about a media advocacy campaign including:

- The message or messages of the campaign,
- The channels through which the message is transmitted, and
- How we seek to frame ourselves and our opposition.

Influencing policy makers usually means placing our message in that part of the news to which policy makers pay the most attention:

- The front section of a newspaper,
- The opinion/editorial section of a newspaper, or
- The first portion of a newscast.

Other audiences are those who shape or influence public opinion, the voting public, active or potentially active citizenry, or that segment of the public that we are trying to organize to support our policy initiative. Here, we can expand our channels to include the features page and more general human interest stories, as long as they maintain the focus on policy and do not shift the issue back to the level of individual behavior.

3. **What is your message?** This is where the rubber hits the road. "*Media bites*", seven to fifteen second encapsulations of the story the way that you want it told, using humor, literary devices or an appeal to the emotions to make an impact on the audience, need to sound spontaneous even if we have practiced them thirty times. Thinking ahead about one's message insures that:

- All members of the group understand and communicate the same message, and
- All materials going to the media support that message.

4. **Evaluation: How will you measure success?** It is difficult to know if you have succeeded if you have no way of measuring success. Measures of success are partly

dictated by a group's goals. For instance, if the goal of a campaign was simply to change a particular policy, then it is simply measured. If the goal is also to stimulate debate and raise awareness about the importance of environmental factors, then this can be measured by the amount of coverage received.

Another important measure of success is how much discussion your coverage provokes. This is partly reflected by how much the story snowballs in the media, traveling from print to broadcast to talk shows to features and opinion pieces. The goal of media advocacy is to place important health issues on the public agenda and increase support for healthier public policies. It is difficult to change public policy if the public does not recognize that the policy needs changing.

For help developing a comprehensive communications plan, go to <http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools.html> for The Praxis Project Media Planning Template and other resources.

Getting Coverage

Below are primary methods for highlighting your issue and event.

Op-Eds—articles you write that are published in the opinion section of the newspaper.

Letters to the Editor—Elected officials pay attention to letters and op-eds generated in their district so plan to generate lots of independent letters to key media outlets. Meet with the paper's editorial board as well. And don't forget to include letters and op-ed pieces in ethnic media including pieces written in languages other than English.

Flash and Internet Campaigns—are low cost video-like productions that can be done using animation software right on your own computer. Add them to your website. Send them to staffers and other key opinion leaders via email, including journalists covering the state capitol beat. <http://flashkit.com/links/Ratings/> lists a number of different software options. For examples of flash ideas, see Amnesty International USA's piece on conflict diamonds <http://www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/d4.html>, or <http://www.grassrootsunity.org/>

Call-in Talk Radio, even if it isn't the topic of discussion—Yes, you can call in and talk about anything. And best of all it's free! So, if the topic is the war, talk about budget cuts to pay for it and the choices legislators are making. If it's schooling, talk about the impact of budget cuts on kids. You get the idea.

Do It Yourself—Record interviews and press events and self publish it on your site or on internet radio sites. Convene local experts (even over the phone) to discuss key budget issues and webcast or even tape the discussion. Work with your local Independent Media Center (or IMC) to produce and disseminate news and information on the issues. In some cases, good audiotapes edited down to 30 minutes or less with well-known experts can be distributed to legislative staffers or made available on your website for background information on your issue. To find out if there's an IMC near you, visit their website at www.indymedia.org

Don't forget Youth, Ethnic, and Alternative Media! These are important media outlets with broad reach. In many cases, "ethnic" media have a larger audience than the local "mainstream" media outlet. Tailor your articles and pitches to the audience and make sure your information is

relevant and up to date. Ask yourself, "What moves them? What do they care about?" Many ethnic media publishing and broadcasting in languages other than English will translate press releases and accept story pitches in English. However, it's great to have contacts that are able to effectively communicate in the media outlet's distribution language – especially for in-depth interviews.

Telling Your Stories

- *Cultivate reporters who are already covering the issue* through one-on-one meetings and phone calls, and sending well-packaged, concise information with contact info for spokespeople. When packaging information think of the data, spokespeople and other information reporters will need to do a good job covering the issue.
- *Identify and compile the right spokespeople.*
 - Who is the best person to deliver the message?
 - Are you representing the breadth of the diversity of communities affected?
 - What will your opponents be saying?
 - What will be strong counter images and messages?
- *Identify a broad range of outlets through which to tell your stories, including media in languages other than English.* Be sure to have spokespeople who can communicate in other languages. These audiences are key voters and potential supporters.
- *Don't forget to practice messages so that everyone is comfortable and stays "on message"* or, in other words, no one gets off track or says anything to contradict what you are trying to communicate. Roleplay interviews and tough questions. Practice responding with your message without getting off track. Remember, you are communicating with your target audience through the reporter. Speak accordingly.
- *Avoid press conferences unless you are sure to attract press.* When possible, look for other newsworthy events on which you can piggyback.

Framing for Access

Getting media attention means getting the news media, that moving train, to stop and pay attention to our issue. Framing a story for the media so it gets their attention is called *framing for access*. There are many framing techniques for getting the media's attention. Featuring celebrities is, of course, one way to attract the media. Here are some other elements of newsworthiness to consider:

- *Controversy, conflict, injustice.* The news media is in the storytelling business. These make stories interesting.
- *Irony or uniqueness.* Something that makes viewers sit up and pay attention; that catches the eye.
- *Population of interest.* Media outlets are businesses that must reach consumers in order to stay profitable. Oftentimes, some demographic groups (and therefore, stories that appeal to them) are of greater interest than others. Call the advertising department of your local media outlet for its package to prospective advertisers.

These materials are free and often outline an outlet's target markets.

- *Significant or serious.* Although this is often subjective, any story affecting large numbers of people is usually considered significant.
- *Breakthrough, anniversary, milestone.* Something new and amazing—like a discovery or new drug; or the commemoration of something important.
- *Local peg, breaking news.* Piggybacking on a news story that is already getting media attention can be an effective strategy. Advocates artfully used the O.J. Simpson case to raise public awareness of the tragedy of domestic violence.
- *Good pictures.* All media, including print media, need good visuals for their stories. Some groups provide balloons and beautiful backdrops. Others opt for more dramatic visuals like candlelight vigils or deteriorating neighborhoods in order to provide news media with some direct experience of the issues advocates seek to address.

Developed in collaboration with Berkeley Media Studies Group <http://www.bmsg.org>

Media advocacy glossary

Access points: contacts that help you get your story in (e.g. Editor, reporter, columnist, editorial writer)

Agenda-setting: the ability of the media to determine what public policy issues are important and to establish the debate around them

Becoming a source: having a relationship with media folk so they use you regularly for background information, comment on breaking news, referrals to other experts

Counter-arguing: anticipating your opponent's arguments in order to develop convincing responses

Creating news: doing something newsworthy -- releasing exclusive information or research, holding a demonstration or press conference, etc.

Creative epidemiology (or "social math"): reworking complicated or old data into a new, easily understood and striking form (e.g. Instead of saying that college students spend hundreds of dollars on booze, say "college students spend more money on beer than books.")

Credibility: the key asset for public health advocates; just as you find certain media more trustworthy than others, media consider some sources more credible than others; the more you provide your information in a context of being accurate and fair -- offering the other side and even phone numbers of sources on the other side -- the more you will have credibility with news outlets.

Cultivating journalists: developing relationships with journalists -- being a person with the person who reports the news -- so that when you want a story done, there is a basic feeling of trust and comfort (well, at least comfort!)

Deadlines: the time after which news outlets don't accept news items (e.g. Most daily newspapers left in the u.s.a. are morning papers for which deadline is usually early during the preceding evening; you have to ask when deadlines are and tailor your delivery to the news organization's deadline.)

Delegitimizing: a central goal of media advocacy; calling attention to practices that undercut the alcohol industry's framing of itself (e.g. Exposing how the industry markets to youth)

Earned media: coverage you receive because of something you have done (e.g. Underage kids picketed gloria estefan/bacardi tour)

Five w's: every lede paragraph of a hard news story should answer who, what, where, when, and sometimes why.

Framing a story: making the choice to bring order to a set of facts to make them compelling and consistent with your policy objectives (e.g. David vs. Goliath is an example of a frame when a community-based organization challenges the national producer of st. Ides malt liquor for giving out posters of its spokesman, rapper ice cube, in their neighborhood.)

Hard news: stories based on facts, usually characterized by straight-forward writing style, lacking people except for their quotes; appearing in front pages of newspaper and metro section rather than feature sections (e.g. "buchanan blasts bush for raising taxes")

Inverted pyramid: the way most traditional hard news stories are written -- the most important facts in the lede (first paragraph) and following paragraph; the least important information at the end so that the editor can cut from the bottom

Lede: the first paragraph of a story or press release, never more than 25 words (preferably much shorter), summarizing what the story is about by answering the five w's

Localizing: looking at a story with national implications from the local perspective (e.g. Doing an article on grandmas raising grandchildren due to the crack crisis in your town on the day the drug czar released his national report)

Media bite: a 7 to 15 second capsulization of your story that in some way is memorable --witty, alliterative, touching (e.g. "up till now, we've let spuds mckenzie be the primary alcohol educator for america's youth. Now the surgeon general wants his turn.")

Media gatekeepers: powerful contacts such as the editor in charge of a health section or editor of the editorial page on a major newspaper

Media list: updated list of people to contact in print, broadcast media for both editorial stories and public service announcements; preferably organized in detail, by ethnic audience, etc., so you can tailor story to outlet

Media window: the amount of time during which a story fits what the press thinks will sell; what the press can see as it moves across the landscape of daily news

Monitoring the media: figuring out who's who behind the face, byline or outlet -- what stories they like to report -- so you can pitch accordingly

News peg: usually a timely "happening" or occurrence around which to do a story (e.g. Black history month could be one news peg for a story on alcohol industry sponsorship in african-american communities.)

Op-ed (opinion-editorial) page: the inside section where the publisher prints his/her opinion, accepts guest editorials and publishes letters to the editor

Opportunism: timing; taking advantage of a news event to get something out of it for your side (e.g. Responding to a story on "60 minutes" that sings the praises of two glasses of red wine a day for cardiac health by putting out a news release -- or doing a press conference -- with prestigious researchers refuting the story)

Paid/unpaid media: paid media is synonymous with advertising you pay for and hence can control timing, content and placement of; unpaid is news story or public service announcement (which you have less control over the timing of, and which often airs at a time when few listen or watch).

Piggybacking: linking your story to an existing story (e.g. Smoking control activists used a scare about cyanide in chilean grapes to inform about the greater amount of cyanide in one cigarette)

Pitching a story: suggesting that a news outlet cover a certain story; usually done with a certain amount of preparation and enthusiasm, hence the "pitch" rather than an unenthusiastic albeit sincere effort

Psa (public service announcement): free, non-controversial, broadcast message (e.g. To prevent alcohol-related birth defects, pregnant women should not drink alcohol)

Public shaming: technique used in paid or earned media in which the media spotlight is focused on one key decision-maker (e.g. When william bennett became drug czar, smoking control advocates took out a full-page counter-ad in an affordable newspaper; mainstream media did a story on that ad.)

Seizing symbols: taking the moral high ground (e.g. When public health advocates have fought for restrictions on alcohol advertising, the alcohol industry has scored points by seizing symbols of democracy such as the right to free speech; advocates responded with "more speech!" -- equal time for counterads and warning labels.)

Soft news: "lifestyle"-type piece; features often characterized by creative writing and descriptions of people; sometimes interspersed in main newspaper sections, but usually in feature sections (e.g. "a day with buchanan on campaign trail")

We/they: a strategy to paint yourself and your opponents to gain your maximum number of allies (e.g. In their opposition to the estefan/bacardi sponsorship tour, advocates criticized bacardi -- not estefan.)