

## Chapter 9

# Media Advocacy

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*Once you “get” media advocacy, you have to do it.  
Or live with the fact that you’re not doing everything  
you can to make a difference.*

— Makani Themba-Nixon in *News for a Change:  
An Advocate’s Guide to Working With the Media* (1999)

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Media advocacy is defined as the strategic use of mass media and community advocacy to advance environmental change or a public policy initiative. The concept has been used broadly on tobacco control and other issues, and it has many applications. One key application is as a response to issues involving well-financed opponents who use money to shape the political and social environment. Compared with public relations, media advocacy is more focused on a particular policy goal, resulting in social change. It’s also more decentralized, community based, and community owned.

The information in this chapter focuses on the strategy behind media advocacy and why it’s important. Practical “how-to” steps for developing materials and working with the media are outlined in Chapter 8: Public Relations. These steps should be reviewed before you read this chapter.

Traditionally, health communications used the media to re-create, on a large scale, the instructive relationship of a physician to patient or a teacher to student. In contrast, media advocacy doesn’t try to persuade individuals to make specific behavior changes, but instead seeks to use the media to change the *social environment* in which individuals make personal behavior decisions. Media advocacy focuses on the social forces that shape behavior—that is, on public and private policy—rather than on personal behavior. The goal is to attain a more sweeping and permanent change in society at large.

## In This Chapter

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- Coordinating Media Advocacy Efforts
- Elements of Media Advocacy: Focus on Strategy
- Media Advocacy in Action: the Art of Framing
- Evaluating Your Media Advocacy Efforts

### *What Media Advocacy Does and Doesn't Do*

#### *Does*

- Rely on collaborative message development
- Reinforce social responsibility for the problem of tobacco
- Focus on advancing policy change
- Give people a voice
- Train the community in media skills
- Help communities create long-lasting environmental change

#### *Doesn't*

- Rely solely on professional message development
- Emphasize individual responsibility for the problem of tobacco
- Tell individuals what they should think
- Give people a message
- Take care of the media for the community
- Guarantee individual behavior change based on new information

Media advocacy is based on an understanding that the media are a tool, not a goal, and that media coverage is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Through the media, advocates gain access and a voice in the social decision-making process. But the use of media alone won't accomplish the goal of change. Media advocacy efforts should be used in combination with other communications and policy initiatives.

Media advocacy is a crucial component of a comprehensive media campaign because it empowers the community and targets policy makers. It's a way of getting your message

heard and inspiring others to join in your cause. It can change attitudes and create a flood of support. Media advocacy begins with the premise that those closest to a problem are the best positioned to fix it and takes advantage of the fact that most media are local. It can extend the reach and penetration of any statewide media campaign by piggybacking national stories and extending the reach of a scientific report or finding.

There are no specific "recipes" for media advocacy. The successful use of media advocacy requires flexibility and being in tune with community issues, needs, and resources so that

opportunities are embraced when they arise. Media advocacy is a learning process, and skills are developed through practice. Media advocacy requires long-term thinking and not being discouraged by short-term setbacks. When media advocacy efforts begin to succeed, you may face greater challenges as the opposition responds.

### *Coordinating Media Advocacy Efforts*

Unlike other counter-marketing components, the role of the state health department in media advocacy is to support the policy efforts of local coalitions, which are often led by advocacy groups. A major challenge for the counter-marketing team is coordinating efforts so that everyone is working toward common or complementary goals and that each partner is working in the appropriate role. For example, public officials may need to avoid lobbying, but other partners may focus their attention in this area. Some partners may be better at collecting data and analyzing results of initiatives to inform changes in strategies.

To ensure that media advocacy efforts and your broader counter-marketing program are consistent with, and supportive of, each other, your counter-marketing team should coordinate its efforts with those of local coalitions as it conducts activities that are best delivered from a central source. Your team should:

- Identify potential statewide and local advocacy groups and individuals that can support your efforts

- Invite representatives from advocacy groups to be part of your campaign advisory board; their involvement in planning and implementation of key strategies ensures that everyone's efforts support a common goal
- Share campaign materials with advocates so that they can comment on these materials, help improve them, help promote the campaign, and deflect criticism and attacks from the tobacco industry and others

You also should consider operating an intra-state media network that includes programs aligned with state goals. Through your network, you can offer:

- Technical assistance, including access to national experts
- Information sharing, particularly on your program's effectiveness and industry opposition
- Networking, which offers the opportunity for brainstorming
- Training in areas, such as message development and spokesperson training
- Evaluation and feedback, which are part of the on-the-job learning that makes advocates better at what they do
- Tools, such as press releases and talking points, that advocates can customize for their communities
- Tie-ins to paid media campaigns, which can help support a program's paid campaign and generate earned coverage

- “Action Alerts,” e-mails that describe key opportunities and how local advocates can take advantage of them

Sharing activities and events through a media network will allow local media advocacy efforts and your program to complement and support each other. Information on how to develop and use media materials and tactics can be found in Chapter 8: Public Relations. The primary pitfall to avoid is providing grants or other funding for local advocacy groups or coalitions without central support, training, technical assistance, and coordination. Without this support, you may find that funds aren't spent efficiently and you may not see the results that indicate progress toward your state's goals.

### Interviewing With the Media: When Less Is More

Anyone who has been interviewed for a local television news program knows the drill. First, you get the call from a producer asking if

you're available. Then, you set up an appointment for the video crew to come and tape the interview. In the intervening time, you might pore over fact sheets and background materials to ensure that you're familiar with the latest information. You might talk to your colleagues and co-workers about what you should say, straighten up your office (and yourself), and maybe call friends and relatives to let them know that you're going to be on TV. When the crew arrives, you drop everything to help them set up. While they're framing the shot and adjusting the lights and the camera, you talk with the producer and/or the interviewer.

Finally, the interview begins. Under the hot lights, you're asked a few questions and give the best answers you can. You may be asked to repeat a few statements. The interview may be over in five minutes, or it may last as long as 20 minutes, but half of your day has been devoted to it.

After all of this investment in time and energy, if you did a really good job, you may be given

10 seconds of news time. If the interview was with a newspaper reporter, the process has been similar (except for the lights and camera) and you might be given a one- or two-sentence quote in the finished story.

Is this tiny payoff worth your time and effort? Don't you have more important things to do? You have so much to say on this important topic! How can they reduce it to 10 seconds or a few sentences?



It may seem like you've invested too much effort for so little in return, but a few well-chosen, well-placed words can have a greater impact than a long treatise. The key is knowing how to use those 10 seconds or those two sentences strategically by framing your message well and aiming it at the right audience.

### Considering the Industry's Response

Media advocacy has been used on a variety of social issues, such as housing, alcohol control, childhood lead poisoning prevention, and violence prevention. Tobacco control advocates

were generating headlines that reframed society's view of tobacco use from a personal decision to a public health problem decades before dedicated cigarette tax increases, successful lawsuits, and the Master Settlement Agreement provided significant funds for sophisticated advertising campaigns. They did this for a very practical reason—it worked!

When people think of using the media to help solve public health issues, too often their imaginations are limited by what they've seen or done before. Posters, bumper stickers,

### *The Roper Report*

*The following are excerpts from the 1978 “Study of Public Attitudes Toward Cigarette Smoking and the Tobacco Industry,” conducted for the Tobacco Institute by the Roper Organization. This study was one of the first internal industry documents to be revealed to the public after it was subpoenaed by the Federal Trade Commission in the 1980s.*

#### Implications of the Findings

The original Surgeon General's report, followed by the first “hazard” warning on cigarette packages, the subsequent “danger” warning on packages, the removal of cigarette advertising from television, and the inclusion of the danger warning in cigarette advertising were all “blows” of sorts for the tobacco industry. They were, however, blows that the cigarette industry could successfully weather because they were all directed against the smoker himself. While the overwhelming majority of the public has been convinced by the antismoking forces that smoking is dangerous to the smokers' health, this has not persuaded very many smokers to give up smoking.

The antismoking forces' latest tack, however—on the passive smoking issue—is another matter. What the smoker does to himself may be his business, but what the smoker does to the nonsmoker is quite a different matter. . . .

This we see as the most dangerous development to the viability of the tobacco industry that has yet occurred. . . . The issue, as we see it, is no longer what the smoker does to himself, but what he does to others.



pamphlets, and public service announcements often have been the media tools of choice, not because evidence suggested that these were effective options, but because these products were most familiar to advocates. By looking carefully at how the industry responds to media advocacy initiatives, media advocacy practitioners are now better able to identify the efforts that are the most threatening to the tobacco industry. Until recently, tobacco control advocates seldom had sufficient funds for solid evaluation research. However, tobacco companies have been able to reach into their own deep pockets to research their opposition carefully. If tobacco companies fight against a tobacco control initiative, it's probably effective; conversely, if tobacco companies support or don't fight against an initiative, then you should probably analyze it well to ensure that it's truly effective before using that tactic in your program.

One example of evolving to tactics that presented a greater threat to the industry relates to the positioning of media messages. Through most of the 1970s, antitobacco media messages tended to be antismoking messages,

focusing almost exclusively on persuading people to either quit or not start smoking. Beginning in the early 1980s, advocates reframed the issue to focus on the rights of nonsmokers and the need to regulate and counteract the tobacco industry's behavior. In other words, individual-focused antismoking messages became industry-focused antitobacco messages. As revealed by the 1978 Roper Report (see sidebar on previous page) and by many other internal industry documents that were subsequently uncovered, this strategy was exactly what the industry feared the most because it posed the greatest threat to its economic future.

### **The Eclecticism of Media Advocacy**

Because many successful media advocacy interventions have produced confrontational, hard-hitting news stories, many people assume that any controversial news story is media advocacy, and that media advocacy is always combative.

Media advocacy does focus on policy change or environmental change. However, it doesn't have to be confrontational, and it isn't limited



to earned media. Media advocacy can refer to a wide range of activities, including:

- Initiating calls, faxes, and e-mails to reporters (“pitching” stories or angles)
- Responding to calls and e-mails from reporters
- Designing good visual images for TV cameras
- Helping to develop messages for targeted paid media campaigns
- Helping to identify or develop good storylines that will appeal to media representatives
- Staging strategic media events
- Developing long-term relationships with editors, producers, and reporters (known as “media gatekeepers”)
- Alerting the media about important political or other policy-related developments and framing these developments for the media
- Meeting with newspaper editorial boards
- Writing opinion/editorial (op-ed) columns and letters to the editor
- Conducting creative research to educate the media and to generate media attention

This list could go on. Anything that is done strategically to use the media to advance policy change or policy enforcement could be called media advocacy. Like other communication strategies, media advocacy works best when it’s designed to advance a specific goal and when it’s part of a comprehensive media plan that employs a variety of tactics, including paid media. (See Chapter 7: Advertising and Chapter 8: Public Relations for more information about earned and paid media strategies and tactics.)

### ***Elements of Media Advocacy: Focus on Strategy***

As noted earlier, media advocacy is the *strategic* use of media and community advocacy to

create policy or environmental change. Those who work with the media face a range of options requiring strategic decisions whenever they have (or create) a piece of news:

- Should I share this information with the press?
- Should I call all of the reporters that I know or offer the story as an exclusive to one reporter?
- Is this development worthy of a press conference?
- Should we stage a press event and hope that the media will cover it?

The answers to these questions vary according to the history, the surrounding circumstances, and the goal of each media advocacy intervention. In every case, the answers should be based on what makes the most strategic sense at the time. For example, holding a press conference may be a wise choice, but only if doing so will be an efficient and effective way to advance toward the overall goal.

The basis for success in every media advocacy intervention is disciplining yourself to answer five important questions:

1. **What do you want?** This first question forces you to begin at the end and work backward by defining your policy goal or purpose in terms that are as realistic and specific as possible. Define the problem that you want to solve in terms that can be addressed by policy change (or policy enforcement), and state the solution that you seek in terms of specific

policy action. You don't need to articulate a comprehensive solution to the problem, just the next concrete step along the path to your goal.

2. **Who can give you what you want?**

Define your target audience. Do you need cooperation from local merchants? Action by the city council? Help from the governor? Who has the power to provide what you need to accomplish your goal? What is their self-interest? Who or what influences them? Are there secondary audiences that you can reach more easily who can influence the primary target? These policy decision makers, not the general public, are typically your primary target audience for media advocacy.

3. **What do they need to hear?** Once you've determined who has the power to provide what you want (i.e., your target audience), you need to determine what types of messages will most likely resonate with them. Begin developing your message by learning what your audience is thinking; don't assume that they'll accept your premises. Will they be influenced by new health information? By popular opinion in the community? By examples of success stories in other states?

4. **From whom should they hear it?**

Identify your messenger by determining who'll have the greatest chance of influencing your target audience. State legislators may be more responsive to a

concerned parent who is also a constituent than to a trained epidemiologist who comes in from out of town.

Conversely, a local board of health may be more responsive to a scientific expert. Learn about the decision-making process that you seek to influence so that you can choose your spokespeople strategically.

5. **How can you reach your target audience?** What kind of media coverage will attract your target audience's attention? Will a letter to the editor be noticed? Will TV news coverage of the results of a new scientific study reach them? Will a staged media event be effective?

### *Case Study: X Marks the Target*

*This case study is excerpted from News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working With the Media (Wallack et al. 1999).*

“X” was a proposed cigarette brand that many activists believed appropriated the strong, positive sentiment that young African Americans have for Malcolm X for use in selling cigarettes. The brand was manufactured by a small Massachusetts company, Star Tobacco Corporation, and marketed and distributed by Duffy Distributors. The packaging, marketing, and low price seemed lethal weapons in the tobacco industry's efforts to hook more young African Americans.

The effort to stop X brand cigarettes evolved out of a network of activists who had been mobilizing communities of color around the targeted marketing of tobacco and alcohol products. Brenda Bell-Caffee, director of the California African American Tobacco Education Network, saw a message about X on a computer mailing list for tobacco control advocates and immediately alerted her colleagues. In the group's assessment, the two small companies that manufactured and marketed the product were more reachable, winnable targets than any relevant public agencies. The strategy was, therefore, crafted to mobilize pressure and shame these companies into revoking the brand.

The group worked to shame the targeted companies by emphasizing two messages: X brand, whether purposely or not, defamed an important leader and cultural icon—Malcolm X; and it was packaged in a way that was sure to attract African American youth. The group gave the companies 10 days to withdraw the brand.

Media played a critical role in pressuring the companies to respond. Activists got the word out to both African American and corporate-owned media outlets, and articles on X appeared in more than 100 newspapers nationwide. Succumbing to national pressure, Duffy Distributors issued a statement one day after the deadline, which—without any admission of wrongdoing—announced that it had decided to withdraw the X brand cigarettes from distribution.

Answer these questions *before* you begin planning each media advocacy event. Review your answers often during the planning and evaluation process.

Sometimes the best media advocacy option is counterintuitive. For example, if someone asked, “What do you do when a reporter asks you a question?” most people would probably say, “Answer it.” But the most obvious response may not be the best. Consider the following options:

- The reporter’s question may not lead to the best information or to information in the best “frame” (more on framing later). You probably know more about the issue than the reporter does. If you’re asked a badly framed question (e.g., one that presumes tobacco control is a battle between smokers and non-smokers), it may be strategic for you to suggest a different question and then answer that one instead (e.g., one that reframes the issue as a battle of smokers *and* nonsmokers against corporations that sell a lethal and addictive product).
- You may not be the most strategic person to answer the question. There may be someone else whose knowledge, skill, reputation, or personal experience makes that person a better choice to answer the question and a better messenger for the information. The strategic choice may be to refer the reporter to this other source and explain why.
- Perhaps you don’t know the answer or don’t know as much as you would like to

answer the question. The most strategic response may be that you’ll investigate and get back to the reporter with the best information available.

If you decide to simply answer the question, you still have a range of choices. Consider the different responses to the question, “What does your organization do?”

- “We fight cancer and heart disease caused by tobacco use.”
- “Right now, we’re trying to help encourage local restaurants to go smokefree.”
- “We support the community’s efforts to reduce tobacco use by young people.”
- “We fight to counteract the damage done by tobacco companies as they try to addict a new generation of customers.”



Even when you’re having a casual conversation with a reporter, you might be faced with a dozen or more questions, each of which produces its own range of strategic options. Whether deciding if you should stage a major media event or answer a simple question from

a reporter, good media advocacy is always driven by strategic thinking. Always keep your eyes on your policy goal.

### Community Empowerment

The second important part of the definition of media advocacy is “community advocacy.”

True media advocacy does not exist without community advocacy. Many traditional media strategies are aimed at trying to change individual behaviors or beliefs. Media advocacy works with the community to change the environment within which individual decisions are made. For example, instead of using the media to try to convince people that smoking is expensive and dangerous, one media advocacy approach would be to try to persuade building owners to ban tobacco use on their premises.

Working with the community is an important part of a media advocacy approach. In many other parts of your counter-marketing program,

specialists or experts can be hired or appointed to plan and execute the strategy for you. However, community-based social change can't be contracted out or delegated; if the community doesn't want to change, change won't happen. When the community does want to change, media advocacy is a way that community members can make the change happen themselves.

### *Media Advocacy in Action: the Art of Framing*

Ask a group of tobacco control advocates whether tobacco receives enough coverage in the news media, and most will tell you that it doesn't. Ask that same group whether they've ever seen any news stories about tobacco that distorted the issue or otherwise didn't help advance tobacco control, and they will tell you that they've seen many such unproductive stories. One of the most common complaints

*When issue advocates sit around a table to talk ‘message,’ they invariably rush to hatching catchy slogans and clever sound bites. Or they concoct elaborate arguments put forward by their adversaries. Good sound bites and slogans—and speeches, policy solutions, meaningful statistics, arguments—all support and reinforce your message, but they aren't what communications experts mean by ‘message.’ To communications professionals, your message is your organizing theme. And no media advocacy campaign can succeed without a powerful, coherent organizing theme, a theme that is at the same time logically persuasive, morally authoritative, and capable of evoking passion. A campaign message must speak at one and the same time to the brain and the heart.*

— Ethel Klein,  
*political scientist*

### *Framing Example: Same Question, Different Answers*

Before you talk to a reporter, you should define your goal and how you hope to accomplish it. Do you want to generate publicity for your organization? Are you trying to advance a specific policy? Are you trying to focus media attention on the role of tobacco companies?

Consider this common question: Why do teens smoke?

Tobacco companies suggest that smoking is normative with this typical answer: “Peer pressure. Teens smoke because they want to fit in with their friends.” Through this response, the tobacco companies are trying to divert attention from their well-financed marketing programs and draw resources away from prevention programs that really do work. This question has many better answers. Each answer brings a slightly different focus to the problem or the solution.

- **Answer:** Teens smoke because we make it easy for them to get cigarettes. Therefore, we need to keep cigarettes out of the hands of our children.
- **Focus:** Youth access laws
- **Answer:** Teens smoke because the tobacco industry needs them to replace dying older smokers. No one knows how to market to a target audience more effectively than this industry.
- **Focus:** Industry behavior
- **Answer:** Actually, teens aren’t smoking as much as they were several years ago. We’re doing a much better job of keeping teens away from tobacco.
- **Focus:** The effectiveness of your tobacco control program
- **Answer:** Not all teens are smoking more. African American teens, for example, smoke at a much lower rate than whites or Asians. We need to put our resources into the areas that need the most help.
- **Focus:** Disparities
- **Answer:** Teens experiment with a lot of things. They continue to smoke for the same reason that adults do—nicotine is highly addictive. We need to give teens the same kinds of cessation services that we give to adults.
- **Focus:** Youth cessation

Even though the reporter is asking the questions, your answers have the power to influence the story and how it’s framed. By answering strategically, you can help increase the chances that they get the story right.

about the news media is that “they don’t get the story right.”

Getting the media interested in a story and helping to ensure that they get the story right are what *framing* is all about. These two facets of framing are called “framing for access” and “framing for content.”

Framing for access is what you do when you’re trying to get the media interested in your story. By gaining the attention of journalists, you gain access to the media. When you’re framing for access, you “pitch” a newsworthy aspect of your story that will make the reporters want to attend your event, interview your spokesperson, and so on. Use the “Checklist to Determine Newsworthiness” found in Chapter 8: Public Relations when selecting the best news angle for each story idea. Consider what each reporter will be the most interested in covering. If you’re trying to educate the community about secondhand smoke to lay the groundwork for clean indoor air policies, and you’re approaching a reporter for the newspaper’s business section, perhaps you can emphasize the economic costs that the restaurant and bar owners incur when their employees become ill from breathing secondhand smoke. If you’re approaching a TV reporter who covers family-related issues, emphasize the risks of secondhand smoke to family members, especially children, who live with smokers. Once you have access to the media, you shift to framing for content. When framing for content, you focus on the perspective of the story and the information that you want to be conveyed. The reporters, editors, and producers

who create news stories have to be selective about what they include and what they leave out of a news story.

The advocate doesn’t make the decisions about what’s included within the frame of a story and what’s left out, but the advocate can influence those decisions. In every interview, meeting, and conversation with a journalist, the goal of the advocate is to frame the story so that it includes the needed information to promote the policy or environmental change goal.

When helping to frame or reframe a story for content, always keep your overall strategy in mind. (Review the answers to the five questions listed earlier in the chapter.) Work constantly to frame stories in ways that help advance your policy goal by delivering the right message to the right target audience. For example, if your goal is to strengthen the enforcement of youth access laws, you might generate some interest by telling a reporter that you have a story about youth smoking rates in your community. You’ll have a better story if you say that you know several teenagers who can tell their personal stories about how easy it is to buy tobacco in the community. You’ll have a great story if you say that you know teens who are organizing to pressure merchants and law enforcement agencies to do a better job of enforcing youth access to tobacco laws.

### Developing the Message

All of the elements of your message—the content, the tone, the messenger, and the medium that delivers it—should be determined by your answers to the five strategic planning questions.

## *Effective Media Bites*

What makes a good media bite? By definition, media bites are short—10 to 15 seconds, or one or two sentences, or sometimes just a phrase. Good media bites can capture complex concepts in simple ways. They paint mental pictures. They evoke strong feelings. They are memorable or witty. But most important, good media bites help advance your strategy. Being quoted isn't worth much if the quotes don't help you accomplish your goals.

Here's one example of an effective media bite:

“Smoking a ‘safer’ cigarette is like jumping out of the 10th story of a building instead of the 12th story.”

This quote addresses the tobacco industry's efforts to create products that seem relatively safe to consumers, such as low-tar cigarettes. This issue can be tricky for advocates because, at first glance, removing some of the harmful ingredients in cigarettes seems like a good idea. The following media bite is a clever way of conveying the idea that no matter what you do to a cigarette, it remains a lethal product:

“Tobacco is the only consumer product that, when used as directed, kills the user.”

One of the tobacco industry's stock arguments is that tobacco is only one of many products (e.g., alcohol and fatty foods) that can be unhealthy. According to this argument, if public health advocates succeed in regulating tobacco use, it will only be a matter of time until they also regulate the use of these other products. The quote points to a crucial distinction: alcohol, fatty foods, and similar products kill when abused or consumed in excess, whereas tobacco products kill when used in their customary, intended way.

You can brainstorm good media bites ahead of time to have them ready when you need them in an interview. Start by anticipating the questions that you might be asked. Then do some research. What have advocates said on this issue before? Modernize bites that have been used in the past by tying them to current developments. Try out different approaches and new ideas. Practice saying your answers out loud. Ask yourself two questions:

- (1) Would this response be likely to make the news?
- (2) Does this answer help advance my goal?

When developing your message, keep it short, simple, and direct. Plan as if your audience will only remember one thing from your media advocacy intervention (think of it as the headline). Decide in advance what that one thing should be, and base your entire communication around it.

Whenever possible, use research techniques, like opinion surveys and focus groups, to develop and test your message. (See Chapter 3: Gaining and Using Target Audience Insights for more information.) If you don't have access to these methods, talk to friends and relatives who don't work in the health field. Discuss the message with members of your target audience (e.g., friendly legislators) who can tell you what the message means to them and how it might influence their actions.

Monitor the media to see how they treat the issue that your message addresses. (See the evaluation section of Chapter 8: Public Relations for details on tracking media coverage.) Monitoring the media will allow you to understand how your issue is being covered and which tobacco control and tobacco industry spokespersons are contacting. Understanding how the media covers your issue is necessary to inform your message strategy. Different audiences may respond to different messages. Your message may (and probably will) have to change over time in response to a changing environment. If you keep your strategic plan in mind, you

can adapt effectively to these changes. Once your messages have been developed, it's important to share them with your fellow advocates so that your message will penetrate the market. It takes many different people saying the same thing to have an impact on policy makers.

Link your message to widely held cultural values. Most Americans have a common core set of values, including concern for health, equality, fairness, protection of children, respect for science, intolerance of deception, and belief in the right to a safe and clean environment. You don't have to convince your audience that these are good things. You only need to show them how these values relate to your message.



### *Case Study: Giving the Target a Choice*

Tony Schwartz provided the paradigm of effective targeting. He made cassette tapes of the following message and sent them to the members of the New York City Council's Health Committee:

To the members of the Health Committee of the New York City Council. We'd like to have you listen to the following two commercials, and tell us which one you will give us the opportunity to run. We are People for a Smoke-Free Indoors. Here's the first commercial.

You know the people in the New York City Council have the power to do a lot of good or a lot of bad. Just a few Committee Members can see to it that a bill gets immediate attention by the whole City Council. Or they can bottle up a bill forever, keeping the City Council from acting on it. Well, the City Council Committee on Health just took an action that all New Yorkers can be proud of. They just voted the smoking pollution control law out of committee, giving the whole City Council a chance to act on it. Despite intense lobbying from very powerful cigarette companies, they took this action for the health of New Yorkers. And so, with real pride and admiration for what they've done for New Yorkers, we say thank you Chairman \_\_\_\_, thank you \_\_\_\_, thank you \_\_\_\_. Thank you all for caring enough about the health of New Yorkers to not give in to the special interests. People for a Smoke-Free Indoors, Inc., paid for this ad to show our appreciation.

Here is the second ad.

You know the people in the New York City Council have the power to do a lot of good or a lot of bad. Just a few Committee Members can see to it that a bill gets immediate attention by the whole City Council. Or they can bottle up a bill forever, keeping the City Council from acting on it. Well, the City Council Committee on Health just took an action that shows they care more about special interests than about the people of New York. They just voted down the smoking pollution control act, giving in to the powerful cigarette companies and preventing the City Council from acting for the health of all New Yorkers. If this makes you mad, write or call the Health Committee members and tell them how you feel. Tell \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_. Tell them all that you don't appreciate it when they show they care more about special interests than they do about the health of New Yorkers. And if you don't tell them now, tell them next election day. Paid for by People for a Smoke-Free Indoors, Inc.

So call me at \_\_\_\_, and tell me which one you'd like us to run.

People for a Smoke-Free Indoors had already purchased the radio time to run one of these ads. The bill passed out of committee and was eventually approved by the full council. The first ad was aired.

A good message does three things:

1. **States the concern** (e.g., secondhand smoke is dangerous to nonsmokers)
2. **Evokes a widely held value** (e.g., it's unfair to impose health risks on nonsmokers while they're trying to earn a living or to enjoy public accommodations)
3. **Presents a solution** (e.g., because nonsmokers have a right to breathe clean air in public places and at work, clean indoor air policies should be supported)

### Targeting the Audience

When you aim at the whole world, you often hit no one. Strategic use of the media includes knowing exactly whom you want to reach and how to reach them.

All stations and publications that sell advertising know the demographics of their audiences. They base their programming on that information and use it to sell advertising. You can use that information to communicate your message to target audiences. Tobacco companies use it with precision to sell their deadly products. For the purposes of media advocacy, don't think of the media as a way to broadcast to the whole world. Rather, think of the media as a way to "narrowcast" your message—to have a personal conversation with your specific target. When narrowcasting is done well, it can function as "guerrilla media." Tony Schwartz is one of the great masters of guerrilla media, producer of some of the first and most powerful tobacco counter-marketing efforts, and the author of *The Responsive Chord*, which is a seminal contribution to media advocacy. He

prefers radio for precision targeting because it's ubiquitous and inexpensive, and it accompanies many commuters to work. When the message is crafted well enough to reflect what's already in the audience's mind, radio is especially effective in piercing the consciousness. As Schwartz points out, "People don't have earlids."

### *Evaluating Your Media Advocacy Efforts*

Changing tobacco policy through media advocacy can take a long time. It's a complex process that requires balancing focus and flexibility. By evaluating your efforts, you can continue to improve how you work with reporters and become more effective in working with them, thus helping to advance social change.

Evaluation can help you respond to the inquiries of various stakeholders. Your funders may want to know whether media advocacy is a worthwhile investment. Media advocates will want to know whether what they did was consistent with their plan and whether their actions produced the results that they wanted. Other media advocates may want to draw from the lessons that you've learned to become more effective themselves. Evaluation of your media advocacy efforts can help answer questions such as the following:

- What happened?
- Did you do what you intended?
- Was your issue covered by a media channel that your target audience sees, reads, or listens to?

- Was your story told in the way that you wanted; that is, did your frame the coverage?
- Were you able to build relationships with media gatekeepers so that you're now a trusted source for them?
- How did those who can effect change (e.g., policy makers) and their constituencies react to the media advocacy effort?
- Did your media work help you build community support for the overall policy or program goal?
- What didn't go well? What will you change in the future?

### **How To Evaluate Your Media Advocacy Efforts**

You may want to review Chapter 5: Evaluating the Success of Your Counter-Marketing Program, which addresses the evaluation process in depth. Be pragmatic in developing your evaluation, and use an approach that's geared to the intended use of the results. To do this, you'll want to involve the intended users in shaping the evaluation from the start.

Evaluating media advocacy will be somewhat different from evaluating other components of a counter-marketing program. Measuring media coverage by counting column inches or by calculating air time won't tell you whether your efforts have helped to advance your policy goals. Moreover, each media advocacy effort is unique, influenced by circumstances and shifting to respond to unplanned events and

breaking news. Many media advocates have used case studies to evaluate their efforts. Case studies can provide in-depth examinations of how media coverage on a particular topic was framed and how community advocates were involved in the media advocacy initiatives.

To conduct a process evaluation, you should focus mainly on documenting what you did, what the media did in response, and whether the message was framed in the way that you intended. You can use logs and other documentation to track your activities and to measure whether you've achieved your process objectives and followed your program plan. To document what the media have done, clip relevant articles from print sources (or electronically search print sources that are also published on the Web) and record the TV and radio news coverage. Assess whether the stories have framed your issue in a way that advanced your policy goals. Try to understand why certain news releases or media calls generated better coverage than others. Review the coverage with colleagues, friends, and critics, and reflect on how the issue was framed. You can also hire media tracking services to compile the news stories and editorials that appeared during a certain period of time and to categorize them by slant, placement, and other factors. In addition, interview key parties, such as reporters and policy makers. If you find that a story didn't capture the interest of reporters, ask them why. These discussions and interviews can help you improve what you do.

To conduct an outcome evaluation, the most important measures relate to changes in social

norms and policies, and the specific measures will depend on your media advocacy goal. For a social norm change, you'll want to survey the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of those among whom you hope to effect change. For a policy change, you'll want to track any actions taken by the key parties to adopt relevant policies. Because these changes often take a long time, you can also measure short-term outcomes, such as whether public officials recite your key messages, facts, or survey results in public forums.

### Using Evaluation Results for Decision Making

Once you've analyzed the news coverage with your colleagues and collected feedback from

reporters and your target audience, you'll want to use the information to adjust your strategy. Results may tell you, for example, that you need to use different communication channels because your information isn't reaching your target audience. Or your review may show that you succeeded in accessing the media, but the information wasn't framed in a way that would advance your intended policy objectives. This finding may indicate that you need more practice in defining and articulating your frame. Using evaluation in this way can help you stay focused, keep the message consistent, reach your target audience, and impact policy to produce the environmental change that you seek.

### *Points To Remember*

The following is adapted from *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working With the Media* (Wallack et al. 1999):

- You can't have a media advocacy strategy without an overall strategy. Think of media advocacy in support of and in addition to other approaches, rather than instead of or in isolation from them.
- If you want to be taken seriously as a credible source for reporters, you need to take the media seriously. If you want to work effectively through the media, you'll need to know the media. You must pay attention to whether and how your issue is covered so that you can be more effective in your own media efforts.
- Understand the conventions and values that drive journalists. Journalists are professionals. Learn how they go about their business and use the common ground that you share to give them good, newsworthy stories while advancing your issues.

*Continues*

### *Points To Remember (cont.)*

- **Pitch stories, not issues.** Tobacco control has been around for a long time. You need to look for new ways to make your issues compelling to journalists and news consumers. Journalists think in terms of stories. Issues can be vague and bloodless; advocates need to make issues come alive by crafting stories.
- **Supply journalists with creative story elements that illustrate the policy solution that you support.** These include good visuals, media bites, and “authentic voices” who can tell compelling personal stories. These elements will help you focus on your solution. The problem may be easier to talk about than the solution, but the solution is more important.
- **Make your news events count.** Plan carefully. Make sure that the speakers, materials, and the setting all reinforce your key message. Know what you want to say, say it, repeat it in different ways, and have others say it.
- **An interview is not a conversation.** Think of interviews as potential vehicles to get your message out. Stick to your agenda, not the reporter’s. Don’t get lulled into casual thinking. Be purposeful and make your point.
- **Use the opinion pages to reach policy makers and opinion leaders.** An editorial page strategy, including op-ed columns, should be part of your media advocacy efforts. It can be more effective than some news events in reaching the people who can make a difference to your issue.
- **Consider all kinds of media in your strategy.** Paid TV and radio advertising, as well as alternative media outlets, all have unique uses and can be effective in advancing your goals. Be sure that you know why a particular media outlet or approach is right for you now. Whatever media you choose, reuse the news: Send copies of articles, op-ed pieces, and letters to the editor to supporters and policy makers (know that all of the policy makers keep clipping files of your issue).
- **Use evaluation to refine your media advocacy strategy and to improve your effectiveness.** Despite your best planning and most rigorous efforts, your approaches will not always work. Take setbacks as a challenge: rethink your strategies, try different messages or messengers, but don’t give up.

The following Web site provides a comprehensive set of tobacco activism resources that you may find helpful when developing your program: <http://www.tobacco.org/Resources/lbguide.html>.

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