

11. Orchestrate Media Advocacy and Work with Journalists

What is media advocacy and how does it work?

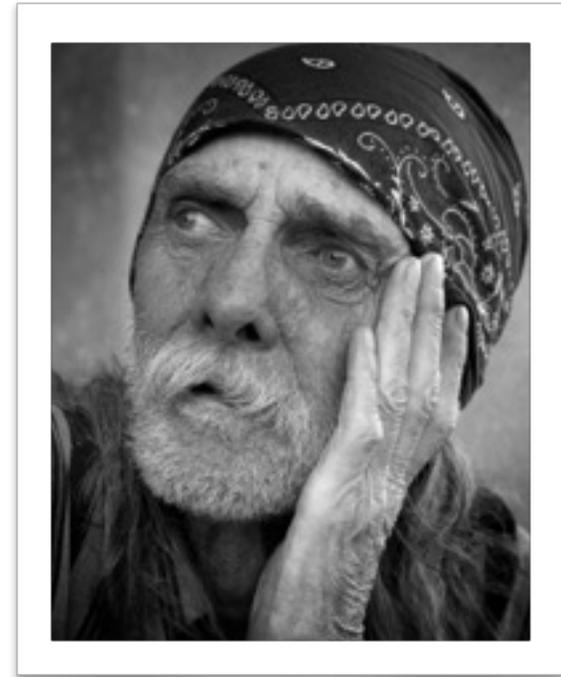
Media advocacy grows from the following premise: *Members of the general public are the ultimate decision-makers and opinion leaders in our society. Community attitudes, beliefs, norms, and practices are shaped by the dialogues that take place within families and the social networks we experience in our everyday lives.*¹

The goal of our media advocacy is to promote public discussion of public toilet facilities and generate community support for new approaches and policies. Communication experts, particularly in the field of public health, stress the importance of understanding the societal context, the community enthusiasms or taboos, and the degree of comfort or discomfort that individuals bring to a discussion of the issues. Media advocacy builds on the knowledge and skill acquired in research, in framing the public toilet issue for different stakeholders, in refining messages, in using the social media to invite participation and in facilitating meetings. Public toilet advocacy needs to be sustained, broadened and deepened. This calls for a strategic approach to media relations and the way advocates engage with journalists and media professionals.

Professor Lori Dorfman of Berkeley Media Studies Group notes that getting our messages out is not enough. Since society bombards us with advertising and public service messages, we learn to become deaf to them. Instead she says, “the business of advocates is news and newsmaking because news is where the policy clout is.”²

In explaining how advocates need to frame their issues, Dorfman uses examples from the long fought and highly successful anti-tobacco campaign. This campaign started out as an “anti-smoking campaign.” Until this campaign was redesigned it was not successful. The anti-smoking campaign framed the smoker and the effect was to blame the victim.

When the frame shifted to “tobacco,” the public started to look at a more complex range of issues. They saw the big corporations in the industry and understood their power to fill advertising space and support highly-paid lobbyists. They looked to government agencies entrusted with public health, authorized to fund research and mandated to regulate harmful substances.



While unhoused city residents need toilets, vertically framing the issue with a portrait of homelessness is not sufficiently broad or inclusive.

Photo by Leroy Allen Skalstad Wikimedia Commons

¹ Health Professionals Creating Solutions to Alcohol Abuse, “What is Media Advocacy?” accessed Sept 2015, http://www.alcoholpolicymd.com/take_action/what_is_ma.htm

² Lori Dorfman, “More than a Message: Framing Messages in Public Health,” (keynote address on video), True Spin Conference, Denver, 2011), accessed September 15, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTncEwyIXYY>

The issue of smoking and health soon had a completely new frame. The vertical frame - the portrait of the smoker - was replaced with a horizontal frame, a landscape of power relationships that called citizens and legislators to action. This reframing made all the difference.



Promote toilets for everybody. Urban livability depends on them. Choose a horizontal frame to show the broad landscape in which public toilets serve a wide range of different users.

We need to shift the frames when talking about our issues. From “toilet” to “public”. From “restroom” to “community well-being.” From “bathroom” to “shared availability away from home that benefits everyone.” And if people associate public toilets with people who

lack homes with bathrooms, then we need to link them to the needs of a pregnant mom with a toddler or the retiree on an outing with his or her wheelchair-using spouse and everybody else. If the portrait in the mind of an opponent is a scruffy homeless person, then we need to show a more inclusive landscape with healthy, happy, active people who need public toilets to stay healthy, happy and active.

What is news?

Media advocacy involves the strategic use of newsmaking.³ Your group of advocates probably follows news about people denied use of restrooms, news about new facilities, or news about the role of toilets in physical and mental health.

You’re a public toilet advocate if you

- Post local news about toilets on Facebook.
- Use Google Alerts to track public toilet news everywhere.
- Set up a Facebook page and Twitter account for your group of liked minded people.
- Follow @WorldToilet @Poop_Project @susana_org @worldtoiletday @SOILHaiti @ToiletHackers on Twitter
- Complain when a public toilet that’s supposed to be open isn’t.
- Take pictures of cool new public facilities you discover.
- Follow #worldtoiletday on instagram
- Speak out on behalf of folks who need a place to go even more than you do.

In time you’re likely to become news! Let’s say you and your fellow advocates continue research into existing local public toilet availability. If you make a proposal or call for action, this is news. When a diverse set of stakeholders come together for a design charrette, that’s news. The recommendations and preliminary

³ Work Group for Community Health and Development, “Media Advocacy,” Community Tool Box, University of Kansas, accessed September 23, 2015, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/media-advocacy>

drawings you make to inform others - elected officials, city planners, and residents - are certainly news. The quality of this information and your relationships with journalists are what shape the public dialogues that lead to change.

Media advocacy includes an interlocking chain of strategies to:

- Educate media professionals about the issues and their impact on community well-being.
- Pressure policymakers to change policies or take action.
- Influence the media to give your campaign a voice and enable your members and partners to speak out and improve a situation that compromises their quality of life.
- Persuade the media to cover certain specific issues, events, projects and people.

Timing is important! Your group might want to put more energy into media relations not only when you're announcing a new project or have scored a success that benefits the community, but also when you have knowledge that relates to current news. You'll also want to direct more resources to media when a policy, regulation, ordinance, or law you support or oppose is coming to a vote and when you have an opportunity to keep your opponents from meeting their goals.

Working with journalists

Your goal as advocates is to create strong, ongoing relationships with media people so they can do their jobs.

- **Be available.** They work at all hours and under tight deadlines. Pick up the phone when they call or get back to them as soon as possible.
- **Be helpful and generous with information that you have the right to give out.** Consult notes. If your group has a website or a Facebook page, refer reporters to posted documents or copy some text and email it to them.

- **Establish trust.** If for some reason you can't share information, politely refuse to comment. Always be truthful.
- **Get it right.** Accuracy is equally important to your group and to journalists. If you don't have the information requested, offer to get it for your contacts and say when you will call them back.
- **Share with journalists occasional national or international reports that complement your views.** Using Twitter to do this can avoid the interruption of a phone call or the time burden of an email.

Be careful, however. All people have biases and reporters are people despite their professional commitment to objectivity. Remember that they probably will talk to your opponents as well. What's more, reporters may get things wrong in their efforts to understand in a day what you have spent months or years learning. When this happens, assess the situation. Politely bring it to the attention of the reporter if a misquote seriously compromises your goals or your name has been misspelled and can be corrected in subsequent or online editions. Otherwise thank the journalist and continue to nurture your relationship.

Using the entire multi-media mix

By now you may be wondering about how to get the media attention in the first place. For grassroots activists, the first priority is effective advocacy at the grassroots level, not media attention. So let's just review some of the other elements in the mix.

- **Outreach to individuals** In conducting research and meeting with stakeholders, you'll be meeting with individuals in your local community and then beyond. Follow basic business protocol in requesting and participating in meetings with civic groups and elected officials. Many city council members state their availability to meet with constituents on their website and sometimes include their calendars.

Consider sharing a business card and a simple leaflet. If you're more comfortable illustrating your words with slides, put together a five minute presentation of not more than ten slides.

- **Business cards** Cards are cheap and easy. They can be homemade and can change. As soon as your group has come together, try one out in your core community and see how people react. Then once you all agree on a name for your group or campaign and have an online presence, create a logo and get business cards printed. Everybody in our organization - PHLUSH - uses a single double-sided card with space to write individual names and contact information.
- **Leaflets** Given the realities of climate change and deforestation, many people are uncomfortable about glossy brochures. A good per-copy price requires a large order and makes updates more difficult. Keep your paper handouts simple. Three panel, two fold leaflets made of a single sheet of paper that can be photocopied in black and white are cheap and effective. Make changes as necessary so that when you need something more professional you will have accurate text and pre-tested messages ready.
- **Tabling** Tabling is the art of setting up a table at an event and engaging passersby. Typically groups cover the table with a bright cloth, put up a sign, lay out business cards, leaflets and a contact information sheet on a clipboard. What's more important is your purpose. What information do you want to convey and what action do you want visitors to take? To educate people about public toilet design, you could lay out large photos of toilets in your area along with examples of much better facilities. Talk about improvements that could be made or sites where new structures could be located. Provide strong visuals and, if possible, physical

objects such as a small model of a prototype or sample construction materials. Take care not to let the table become a barrier between you and the public.

- **Writing an op ed** An op ed is an opinion piece of about 750 words that has moved beyond the page *opposite* the *editorial* page in a traditional print newspaper. Writing an op ed in the name of your organization is one of the best ways to reach a broad audience at almost no cost. If you've done your homework, your group can probably demonstrate that you are the expert local voice on long-neglected public toilet issues. Op eds usually respond to current news. To spot these opportunities you need to keep tracking the news; Google Alerts or Twitter hashtags are useful for this. Or write one for World Toilet Day on November 19th and submit at least two or three weeks in advance. There is a wealth of guidance online on how to write great op eds.⁴ A published op ed is a great addition to your media advocacy kit. An unpublished op ed is a good thing to have approved internally and at the ready for the next opportunity that presents itself.
- **Conference presentations** Registration fees put conference attendance out of the reach of most grassroots activists. However, fees are usually waived for presenters. Look for opportunities to adapt some of your research for presentation at conferences for urban planners, health professionals or active living advocates. You may be asked to submit only an abstract or an outline of your proposed presentation. If accepted, you have great motivation and usually about nine months to complete a paper and/or presentation tailored to the interests of your audience. Volunteering before and during a conference is also a way to get registration fees waived.

⁴ See, for example, David Jarmul, "How to Write an Op-Ed Article," Duke University, 2013. http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped, accessed October 8, 2015.

- **White papers** A white paper is a report by a government agency or advocacy group that provides authoritative information and proposals on an issue. If you present at a conference and receive input that validates or strengthens your position, consider writing or rewriting the presentation as a white paper. An element of media advocacy, the white paper can be passed to a journalist by anyone in your group and the journalist may liberally share your ideas, attributing them to your group.
- **Conference booths** Exhibit space at large conferences in hotels or convention centers is also very expensive. However, if you design a display that is pertinent and compelling you might request a fee waiver or sponsorship. You can justify the expense in materials and time if you can also use elements of the display when you table at smaller events.
- **Letters to the editor** Challenge members of your group to write letters to the editor on toilet issues. Letters should be personal, although the writer may make mention of the work of the group. Most letters are now submitted online and guidelines for submission are provided. There are also opportunities to comment on articles and letters in local media in other regions. One caveat, however: online comments may be dominated by anonymous writers who are negative and impolite. In this case it's simply best not to engage.

Digital advocacy and social media

Social media is shorthand for digital tools such as websites, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, email, and texts. Since their use in advocacy is developing so quickly and with so much innovation, we'll stick to strategy essentials and provide only the broadest guidelines. For the specifics of how to use each social media platform, only

regularly updated online resources, including "Help" sections, are reliable.

Your website homepage will probably have logos to connect people to your social media accounts. Your social media tools should work together. Messages on different platforms are similar but not identical and all are consistent with your stated mission and goals. For a campaign that is shorter term and more focussed than a broadly educational website, a Facebook cause page is an option. Choose the tools most likely to attract and engage supporters. Get comfortable using these tools. At first, simply observe how others use them, paying attention to etiquette and to the customs of each particular platform.

Social media objectives need to support your advocacy goals. The world of blog posts, digital news, and Tweets is noisy and cluttered. Choose a few tools and develop them. Find out where your supporters are most likely to be online. Go where they are, use the tools they use, and engage powerfully with each online community.

Case Story: WTO toilet advocates piggyback on unrelated media event.

You've probably heard of Black Friday, but what about Brown Friday?

The World Toilet Organization (WTO) needed to raise the \$30,000 to build a toilet building for a school in KwaMashu, South Africa. So in launching their fundraising effort, they appropriated the U.S. shopping event in late November known as Black Friday. Their more principled alternative was an Indiegogo crowdsourcing campaign dubbed Brown Friday. "So instead of just shopping for shit," said WTO, "People can give a shit too,"

Source: "Brown Friday" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7js_35tCpQ

The Community Tool Box, an open source, regularly updated 7000-page compendium of communication in English, Spanish, French and Arabic, advises social media users to balance non-self-interested material with self-interested material in a ratio of about three to one.

Resist the urge to solely promote your cause. Instead, listen and monitor the activity of other users, just as you would do if you were walking into a room and speaking to people in person. Once you have a good sense of the ongoing conversation or interaction, begin to engage. Likewise, as you begin to interact with others, develop a tone of voice that is authentically your own – you don't want to come across as promotional, corporate, or bureaucratic. Share your point of view in a way that is open, positive, and enthusiastic. Be sure to credit others when repeating information.⁵

Social media tools need to work with printed materials and personal outreach. Strive for a consistent look, tone and use your group's logo, tagline or key campaign message across all media in your mix.

It's helpful to have a brief written communications policy. This is especially important if several people are representing the organization on one account. If you give responsibility to a specific volunteer, you may wish to provide approved material which can be issued at optimal times. Digital advocacy peaks on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays and these are the days you're likely to get attention. Twitter, Facebook and most blogs allow you to schedule posts.

⁵ "Using Social Media for Digital Advocacy." Chapter 33. Section 19. Community Tool Box. Work Group for Community Health and Development. University of Kansas. ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/electronic-advocacy/main, accessed Oct 15, 2015.