

Media advocacy seeks to influence the selection of topics by the mass media and shape the debate about these topics. It combines the separate functions of mass communication with community advocacy.

For our purposes, media is any form of information or news that reaches a very large audience. So...what is advocacy? Advocacy creates a shift in public opinion by mobilizing the necessary resources and forces to promote a cause.

Part of advocacy is getting the media's support for your cause. The media brings attention to specific issues and thereby can set agenda for policymakers and the public. This makes it a crucial tool for advocates. Yet by selecting some events and not others for news coverage, the media send a signal to the public about what is important and worth thinking about. The job of advocates is to focus the media's spotlight on a particular issue and to hold it there, providing the first step for public awareness and change.

Important Considerations When Developing Your News Story

1. Make your issue newsworthy.

Most importantly: Keep your message short, punchy, and to the point. Make stories relatable to the public and requiring urgent attention. Here are some ways to do this:

- Tie your story to a hot topic currently being covered in the news
- Highlight injustices or hypocrisy that your story reveals
- Link your story to local issues that impact residents
- Detail a controversy or conflict in the community
- Identify individuals with direct experience who can provide an authentic voice in your story
- Relate to a significant anniversary, milestone, or holiday
- Include compelling visuals in your story or provide journalists with an interest scene or event to shoot

2. Have your issue covered the way you want.

Getting your story into the news is only half of the battle; how your issue is covered is just as critical because it influences what viewers think about the issue and its possible solutions. Framing is the process that allows advocates to move from a basic consideration of the presence or absence of an issue to how that issue is portrayed. Frames are the boundaries around a story. The way issues are framed helps news consumers decide who is responsible for the cause and solution of a problem.

Here is an example: Many people view tobacco use as an individual choice. But the solution is not as simple as "saying 'no' to drugs." Tobacco is part of a corporate enterprise that actively promotes the use of health-damaging products. When news stories focus on an individual's choice to use tobacco, the solution that follows is about what individuals can do to stop smoking. Alternatively, when stories shine light on how

tobacco companies aggressively market their products, solutions may focus on how to limit tobacco marketing practices.

Advocates should use an environmental frame by painting a vivid picture of how the environment contributes to poor health, as well as the kind of place that supports health.

3. Incorporate values

Use certain values to create environmental frames:

- Use *fairness* to show that certain communities do not have a fair chance to live healthy lives, and that policy change will help even the playing field so all communities have access to health.
- *Ingenuity*, or “can-do spirit”—the idea that communities can and do work together to create lasting and meaningful change—can help people see that it is possible to establish policies that benefit the common good, even though it might be difficult.
- If you begin with statements that trigger context, you can talk about our responsibility as a community to *prevent* health problems by creating the environments in which all people can enjoy long-term good health.

4. Include a call to action.

The conclusion to an issue should be the policy you seek to advance rather than a “quick-fix” that will not solve the root causes of the problem.

Advocates must clearly articulate a desired solution that the media can easily use, moving a policy forward.

Works used:

Wallack, Lawrence, and Katie Woodruff, and Lori Dorfman, and Iris Diaz. News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working With the Media. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999.

Wallack, Lawrence, and Lori Dorfman, and David Jernigan, and Makani Themba. Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1993.