

Messages and Media

Advocacy is all about communication, of information, stories, and arguments. While sometimes that communication happens in meetings and in small settings, it also takes place before a broader public audience. Effective use of messages and media is critical.

I. A Tool with Many Purposes

In advocacy, the use of messages and media work has many different uses, and the strategy for each will be different:

- *When public attention is essential:* Messages and media are the main tool to get that attention.
- *A tool to frame the issue your way:* As a way to tilt the debate to your advantage.
- *A method for pressuring your targets:* Few things draw the attention of officials as quickly as media coverage.
- *A means of mobilizing your support:* Being visible encourages people and organizations to get involved.
- *A way to boost public awareness:* In some cases getting the information out to people is the main goal.

II. Making your Advocacy Message Effective

Your advocacy message represents the whole undertaking, and it should be as strategic, thoughtful and effective as possible.

- *Keep it simple:* Lead with the basics and only then go into more detail and only the detail that makes sense for a given audience. What's the problem and what is the solution? Avoid jargon and terms that will leave your audience confused.

- *Make it Compelling:* Talk about people, tell stories, appeal people's head and heart at the same time.
- *Build in your defense:* If there is an argument against you (and there always is) say it and refute it confidently.
- *Say it again, and again, and again:* Messages have to be repeated over and over in different forums before they actually sink in.

III. Getting the Media Interested

The media – print, broadcast, Internet and others – are the essential instrument for getting your message out widely. Getting the media interested involves a set of strategies, including these:

- *Make your story newsworthy:* Why is it important? Who is affected and in what way? Why is it important now? Is there new information? Is it tied to some larger event in the news? Is a decision about to be made or has been made?
- *Make your story easy to cover:* Give reporters the information they need and give reporters access to the people they will want to talk with.
- *Build relationships with reporters:* Who covers the issue? Make contact when you aren't pitching a story.