Blowing Away the Smoke: A Series of Advanced Media Advocacy Advisories for Tobacco Control Advocates

Revised Series
September 1998

A Project of the Advocacy Institute

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES BY MIKE PERTSCHUK

Whoever wants to fight lies and ignorance today, whoever wants to speak truth, must surmount at least five difficulties. He must have the courage to speak the truth when it is everywhere stifled; the intelligence to recognize it when it is everywhere hidden; the art to make it manageable like a weapon; the judgment to choose who will know how to make it effective; and finally the guile to make them understand it.

—Bertolt Brecht, 1935

WHY WE NEED THESE ADVISORIES

If you've been working on tobacco control advocacy in this country, in this decade, and you happen to pick up these advisories, you may be surprised, wondering:

> *"**More** tobacco stories? You've got to be kidding! Tobacco issues get more ink day in and day out than just about all other public health issues combined!*
>
> *"**Better** tobacco stories? C'mon. The media trumpet every new study linking tobacco to yet another malady; headline every whistleblower who steps forward to unmask yet another industry cover up; beat up on politicians who take tobacco money and do the tobacco lobby's dirty work.*
>
> *"Let a political candidate even mumble something about his doubts that smoking is addictive, and the press will eat him alive for a month!*
>
> *"Why more media advocacy guides? Who needs them?"*

We all need them. These six advisories are designed to tell you why and to give you practical suggestions about how you can work with your coalitions and the media to advocate for tobacco control policies.

THE SIX ADVANCED MEDIA ADVOCACY ADVISORIES

Advisory No.1: Overcoming New Barriers to Media Coverage
Advisory No.2: By the Numbers: A Guide to the Tactical Use of Statistics for Positive Policy Change
Advisory No.3: Getting the Message Right: Using Formative Research
Advisory No.4: Lessons from the Frontlines: Tobacco Control Media Advocacy in Communities of Color
Advisory No.5: Framing for Access: How to Get the Media's Attention
Advisory No.6: Framing for Content: Shaping the Debate on Tobacco

THE ROLE, NATURE, AND PROMISE OF MEDIA ADVOCACY

There's no question that advocates have made tremendous advances against the public health scourge of tobacco. All across the country, communities have empowered themselves through strategic advocacy efforts to fight for—and win—new tobacco prevention policies. Even at the Federal level, the government is finally beginning to meet its responsibilities to protect children from this deadly, addictive drug.

We have achieved these successes in large measure through media advocacy—an essential working tool of public health advocates. Media coverage of tobacco has grown from one or two national stories a day in 1990 to six or seven each day today. Put simply, no significant tobacco prevention policy has been or can ever be enacted without the support of a strong advocacy campaign; and, no such campaign in this day and age can succeed without a strategic, integrated media component. Media advocacy is about fighting in the public policy arena for policy change: *that is the role of media advocacy.*

Here are several ways of looking at what media advocacy does and how it works:

- Media advocacy is the strategic approach to mass media taken by community-based groups to help advance a social or public policy initiative.

- Media advocacy works primarily to develop and shape ("frame") news stories in ways which build support for public policies. This approach is distinct from public health education or social marketing efforts, which seek to use the media to help persuade viewers and readers to change their individual health behaviors.

- Media advocacy seeks to build the capability of community leaders to treat strategic media initiatives as an integral component of community-focused issue campaigns. In contrast, the public relations approach tends to actually conduct media relations for client groups without building the capability of community leaders themselves.

- Media advocacy tells stories that attract the interest of the media and build support for the policy objectives of community-based groups.

- In developing media advocacy strategies, community groups learn to craft their media messages collaboratively, and as a result the messages are grounded both in the values they stand for and in the policy objectives they seek. Other approaches tend to use messages developed by outside experts, based on polling and focus group testing alone without regard to the broad values and goals of the group.

Media advocates view the media as a resource that must be approached opportunistically and pursued aggressively. Because there is almost always a force countering our policy goals, media advocacy requires both affirmative policy advocacy and strong counteraction to opposition strategies and tactics. In fact, a media advocacy campaign resembles a political campaign in that the competing forces continuously react to the evolving media environment, leading stories, unexpected events, and breaking news: *that is the nature of media advocacy*.

While there is a role for paid media (i.e., advertising) in media advocacy, "unpaid media" (i.e., the news media) is the prime arena for contesting public policies. So media advocates make it their business to know the news media's business well—what makes a good story and when; what the journalist needs from the advocate to cover an issue well; and what types of stories are most likely to be covered. Advocates might rail privately at the flaws and biases of journalists and other media gatekeepers, yet they understand that they must work within the reality of the media where profit is a primary guiding force.

Tobacco control advocates have used media advocacy strategies to garner coverage of tobacco issues from a policy and social perspective, highlighting the role of tobacco industry advertising, marketing, public relations, and political activities in maintaining and promoting tobacco use, especially among youth. By focusing attention on this public dimension of the tobacco problem, advocates have achieved many sound public health policies at the local, state, and national levels: *that is the promise of media advocacy*.

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OVERCOMING NEW BARRIERS TO MEDIA COVERAGE

Advisory No. 1

MEDIA BARRIERS TO PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRESS

Even with the movement's great achievements, the tobacco wars are far from won. Public support for tobacco prevention policies is broad but not deep; many in the media and the public, despite the flood of tobacco media coverage, do not see the need for strong new policies. Yet, we know that there is much more to be accomplished in public policy: bold excise tax increases, strong advertising restraints, effective youth access policies, truly smokefree workplaces and public places.

Tobacco control advocates rely on media coverage to foster and deepen the public's commitment to tobacco issues and increase their understanding of the most effective solutions—strong tobacco prevention policies, not individual behavior change. But at the same time that we are just beginning to reach the public, reporters are becoming jaded on the tobacco issue. One prominent national television commentator told us: "Our newsroom is divided between those who leap at any press conference on a tobacco issue like a plaintiff's lawyers to an accident—they can't get enough stories to stick it to the tobacco companies —and the rest of us, who weren't that excited about tobacco stories in the first place, now think we've done tobacco to death!" She added that those who are sick and tired of tobacco stories are in the majority and are increasing in number.

Why is this happening? How can reporters and the public declare that the battle against tobacco is over and tobacco is "old news"—even as the death toll continues to rise? The reality is that the media successes we have experienced so far may have generated new kinds of barriers to gaining news coverage.

The solution: We need to become more sophisticated media advocates in order to respond to and face this new challenge. First, we need to identify the current barriers to media coverage and the factors that prevent tobacco control advocates from garnering frequent, policy-focused coverage of tobacco issues. Then, we can catapult over these barriers!

Each potential tobacco control story, and especially each television story, faces three fundamental barriers to coverage—a "triple challenge" that can weaken or obstruct the public health message carried by tobacco control advocates: (1) episodic reporting, (2) perception that health is a purely individual responsibility, (3) libertarian values.

BARRIER #1: "EPISODIC" (VS. "THEMATIC") REPORTING

The first lesson for tobacco control advocates is a lesson we know but never learn: *Today, public issue agendas are largely determined by television news stories and how those stories are told.* Yes, newspapers and magazines still have an important impact on the attentive public, that is, active citizens and opinion leaders. But 65% of Americans now get most of their news—and derive much of their understanding and even their feelings about public issues—from commercial television.[1]

Ironically, print coverage may be important largely to the extent that broadcast producers and reporters read the leading national papers avidly. Broadcast journalists take their cues from them—from the *New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times*—on just what stories they should cover. When the print media highlight tobacco industry activities that support and promote tobacco use, and explain public policy solutions to reduce tobacco's negative social impact, broadcast coverage follows.

The problem is that television stories usually do not point to the root causes of problems, nor do they point to institutional sources for solutions. Stories that *do* have a systemic, policy focus are called "thematic stories."[2] A thematic story attempts to capture the systemic nature of a problem, portraying individuals, systems, and outcomes as connected. In contrast, television is drawn to self-contained stories of individual behavior. These "episodic" stories seem to be determined by the strengths or weaknesses of those directly involved, to the exclusion of larger social forces.

TV cameras and TV producers are drawn by the very nature of the medium to stories that "tend to be event oriented, specific, and concrete. They use compelling pictures to tell a short, simple, and personal story."[3] Such stories are easier to tell than thematic stories, which require at least modest research, and, for most viewers, are less appealing to watch.

If we were physicians diagnosing the malady of television news, we might label it "episodic myopia"—the inability to see beyond the events occurring before our noses.

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[1] *Media Matters*, Institute on News and Social Problems, 1995.
[2] Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues,* University of Chicago, 1987.
[3] Larry Wallack et al., *Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention*, Sage Publications, 1994, p. 72.

And this malady leads to serious malfunctions in the body politic: confusion, disorientation, and blurred vision about the impact of social forces and public policy on individual behavior.

Because of the current media environment, it doesn't require a tobacco industry/media conspiracy to end up with mostly episodic tobacco stories. Absent the right kinds of media advocacy efforts by tobacco prevention advocates, a TV report on increased teenage smoking will focus on stories of individual teenage smokers, rather than how the tobacco industry targets its marketing and advertising at teenagers.

For example, a TV story about under-age youth access to cigarettes might well follow a group of early-teen youths buying cigarettes from vending machines or glassy-eyed store clerks. What viewers will likely take away, Professor Iyengar warns us, is a vision of individual kids beating the system and of naïve (but not necessarily typical) store clerks. No explanations are given in this account of the industry's practices that support, even encourage, illegal cigarette sales to youths, or of their efforts to kill strong youth access laws. Thus, the viewer is likely to come away from such stories confirmed in the belief or prejudice that teenagers get cigarettes and smoke because, well, they're teenagers—and that's just what you expect from teenagers! Such viewers are not likely to come away believing that vending machine bans, or stronger licensing regulations, or advertising restrictions are sorely needed, or are even promising solutions.

This type of episodic coverage lets both the tobacco industry and the government off the hook.

BARRIER #2: HEALTH PERCEIVED AS A PURELY INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

> *The primary source of social and health problems, it is assumed, resides in individuals' personal behavior or biological makeup. In the case of personal behavior, blame is easily assigned; in the latter case, the individual is not culpable but bears the stigma of ill-health or disability. Both cases, however, deem social, political, or economic factors irrelevant; rather, health problems are a matter of individual choice or biological predisposition.*[4]

Public health researchers note the tendency, especially among Americans and American media, to treat health issues as primarily problems of individuals. This attitude poses a serious threat to the long-term success of tobacco control policies.

In the past—and very possibly in the future in the absence of new tobacco prevention media advocacy strategies—the news has focused on tobacco exclusively as a health risk, producing stories emphasizing smoking as an individual behavior. For example, the news media are obsessed with reporting scientific discoveries that identify cancer as caused by "bad genes," a story that detracts from one of the key cancer-causing agents: the tobacco industry. By focusing on "bad genes" rather than the tobacco industry, the news media are ignoring the fact that tobacco use is addictive and that the addiction is promoted by an agent that stands to make millions of dollars from this addiction.

Americans are drawn to such individualistic explanations because these ideas are relatively simple and readily grasped. They do not require lengthy, complex analysis. And that's precisely what television news is looking for! So Americans' predisposition to perceive health risks as problems of individuals reinforces the predisposition of television newscasters to treat all stories as "episodic," as simply stories of individuals and their problems.

Once again, the tobacco companies and the government are off the hook.

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[4] Ibid., p. 8.

BARRIER #3: THE ASCENDANCY OF LIBERTARIAN VALUES

When Food and Drug Administration Commissioner David Kessler persuaded President Clinton to back strong new FDA regulations to curb tobacco advertising and marketing targeted at young people, the tobacco industry's public relations machine promptly unrolled reams of the crude, anti-government libertarian rhetoric that seems to work well for most corporate lobbies these days. Their messages were similar to these:

> "President Clinton is once again giving federal bureaucrats the power to tell states, cities, parents, and the private sector how to do their jobs."
>
> "Tobacco products are already over-regulated, with more than nine federal agencies currently regulating tobacco and all 50 states having tobacco youth access laws on the books."
>
> "This government power grab should send a cold shudder through all American businesses and consumers. Today's government villain is tobacco. Tomorrow, chocolate, caffeine, or cholesterol could be the FDA's next convenient foe."
>
> "Big Brother has again chosen a federal approach to family and local problems."

It is not an accident that the tobacco industry's public relations strategists have abandoned their decades-long effort to deny the scientific case against tobacco. Not that they have openly embraced the scientific verdict; rather, they have ardently sought to change the subject from the health risks of tobacco use, and the need for responsive public policies, to the dangers of excessive government involvement in our lives.

This libertarian alarm is sounded hourly by the tobacco lobby because these messages resonate powerfully with Americans and dovetail perfectly with episodic media coverage:

> A progressive perspective regards social justice as the foundation of public health. The larger society, however, resonates more closely with principles of market justice...market justice is based on key assumptions that largely determine the acceptable range of approaches to public health problems. For example, notions of rugged individualism, self-determination, strong individual control and responsibility, limited individual obligation to the collective good, and limited government involvement in social activity are cornerstones of the market justice ethic.[5]

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[5] Ibid., p. 7.

This is why the tobacco industry enthusiastically supports those Washington think tanks that heartily embrace the free-market, libertarian political philosophy: it leads to a focus on individual responsibility and excludes government intervention.

Again, not tobacco companies, not government.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS: RISING TO THE TRIPLE CHALLENGE

In sum, these three barriers—"episodic" story telling, the American predisposition to treat all health risks as individually determined, and the power of libertarian rhetoric—strengthen and reinforce one another to keep many tobacco stories out of the news media. Those stories that *are* covered usually take the focus away from public health and the need for public action and institutional policies. So even as coverage increases, public interest in tobacco prevention can wane. Eventually, the media and the public will simply turn away.

That is the real threat to better tobacco policies. The tobacco industry is rich in financial, political, economic, philanthropic, and public relations resources; once the spotlight of media attention fades, the tobacco lobby will be free to operate where it works best—in the dark. Strong laws now in place, like the FDA rules and local clean indoor air ordinances, will be undone or overridden by stealth lobbying in the shadows of state capitols.

If we fail to build and improve our media advocacy skills to deal in this sophisticated media environment, we will be eclipsed by the tobacco lobby's ever-growing media resources and expertise. The tobacco prevention movement will be regarded by 21st century historians as a quaint interruption in the centuries-long success of tobacco marketers in the unrestrained exploitation of the marketing potential of a legal, addictive drug.

But we *are* moving forward. We have come a long way since 1988, when the National Cancer Institute released its *Media Strategies for Tobacco Control* guide, and even 1994, when *Media Advocacy and Public Health*, the "bible" of public health media advocacy theory and practice, was published. New academic research can shed practical light on our media advocacy efforts: political science media effects research, cognitive linguistics research, public health communications research, formative research (polling and focus group message development), research on communicating with statistics, social psychology, and other relevant published research.

Meanwhile, in the last few years, tobacco control advocates all over the country have refined and sharpened their media advocacy techniques—their knowledeable approaches

to journalists, their use of polling and focus group research to help shape more resonant messages, their ability to make a newsworthy silk purse out of a sow's ear of dull data.

And we have all learned much, much more than we ever wanted to know about the tobacco industry's media strategies and tactics! In so doing, we have gotten far better at turning the tables on the industry and using their own tactics to develop helpful media stories for us.

There's no question that sound, energetic media advocacy will catapult us over the media's barriers to our ultimate targets: better tobacco prevention policies and a healthier society. Working together, we will reach those goals!

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BY THE NUMBERS: A GUIDE TO THE TACTICAL USE OF STATISTICS FOR POSITIVE POLICY CHANGE

Advisory No. 2

As an advocate for policies to reduce the public health threat that tobacco poses in our society, you know that "the numbers game" is a critical part of every battle. Some of the clearest evidence of the need for strong tobacco control policies is captured in statistical data. These figures are among the most powerful tools for engaging and persuading policymakers and the media on this critical issue.

Statistics do not tell a story simply by virtue of their existence; like any other form of information, you must craft them into clear, accurate, and compelling arguments, and use strategically to support your position. Just as importantly, those who seek to preserve the status quo have long since mastered the art of manipulating and distorting statistics to promote their views, so you must be able to challenge and answer their data

This advisory (1) explains the essential steps in crafting and presenting a strong statistical argument, (2) identifies some useful sources of tobacco-related information, and (3) provides strategies you can use in answering the sometimes misleading statistical claims of pro-tobacco advocates. These tools will help you use statistical data to make the honest, fair, and reasoned arguments that will lead to stronger tobacco control policies, and better public health.

① *FACTS DON'T SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES: THINK STRATEGICALLY*

As a tobacco control advocate, you have the facts on your side. An ever-increasing number of studies, polls, and government statistics demonstrate the need for stronger tobacco control policies. But these facts don't speak for themselves—you must make them speak by using them in compelling ways. This section offers strategies, tools, and

techniques to help you use the evidence you find to make the greatest impact possible in support of your policy objectives.

EMPHASIZE THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

At its heart, any tobacco policy effort is about acknowledging tobacco as a public problem requiring a *public* solution. Those who fight for laws that restrict children's access to tobacco, for example, recognize that while personal choice may be a factor in underage tobacco use, the social environment plays a powerful role in exposing children to the risk of tobacco addiction. Policy changes that reduce those risks are effective responses to this grave threat to public health.

Because reaching a public audience is so often a decisive factor in achieving new policies, advocates must use the media strategically to draw attention to their issue and the need for change. This practice, known as media advocacy, focuses the public's attention and understanding on the critical social dimension of a community's tobacco-related problems. (For more on media advocacy, see Advisory #1, Introduction to the Series.)

As media advocates, you face serious challenges. You must compete with many opposing sources of information—and misinformation—and you must compete for your audience's attention. Most of your audience will not pay careful attention to tobacco issues, and much of the knowledge they do have is about individual behavior, not the societal factors that influence that behavior. For example, when most people think of the link between tobacco and disease, they remember an ill friend or relative "unlucky" enough to get sick. The media responds to and reinforces this individual or *episodic* orientation by framing stories to appeal to that orientation. But every story of one person's tobacco-related illness—even if it seems sympathetic to the tobacco control cause—can undermine the viewer's understanding if it ignores the very real social sources of this private tragedy.

Research has shown that public understanding of social problems is shaped by both fact and fiction as presented through the media and by the amount of attention given to an issue. Many believe, for example, that tobacco use causes no more disease and death than air pollution, AIDS, or illicit drug use. That erroneous perception derives in part from the media's increased attention on the deceit of the tobacco industry and its decreased attention has been paid to the enormous public health toll of tobacco use.

These patterns of thinking are so consistently reinforced in the media that it can be hard even for committed anti-tobacco activists to keep focused on the fact that tobacco addiction and disease result from social factors that can be changed by public policies, not simply because of individuals making uninformed or unwise decisions.

With every media advocacy effort, it is important to keep asking yourself the following questions:

1. Have I highlighted the wide prevalence—the social significance—of tobacco-related health problems?

2. Will the audience understand better how the social environment (tobacco industry promotion and marketing, weak tobacco control policies, lax enforcement) influences the "choice" to become addicted to tobacco—or to be exposed to the tobacco smoke of others?

3. Have I made clear the need for policy change to address the problem, and its ability to make a difference?

Example: The early death of a talented celebrity from a tobacco-related disease provides a newsworthy opportunity for a report on the dangers of tobacco use. Focusing on the loss of a single individual would only reinforce the audience's view that the death was an isolated incident. To make the story reflect the social context of a tobacco-related death, the media advocate must work with the media contact to put into perspective the role of industry promotion and early addiction in tobacco use and disease.

One effective way to do this, while keeping the "hook" that makes the story appealing to the media, is to note the age at which the celebrity took up smoking, along with any comments he or she might have made about finding smoking glamorous. This can be linked with the efforts of the tobacco industry to replace its dying customers—including the celebrity—by promoting cigarettes to children. This effort to develop new customers thus sows the seeds for society to lose hundreds of its *future* talented individuals.

Forget for a moment about [Leonard] Bernstein's music. Forget about "West Side Story" and "Candide"... Bernstein is dead, which means that as a smoker he has to be replaced... . So, in that spirit, the cigarette lobbyists were down at City Hall yesterday complaining about a bill that would make it tougher for kids to use cigarette vending machines.

You can understand that, can't you? Keep the vending machines away from the kids and you might lose the opportunity of hooking a child on nicotine and thus replacing the departed Bernstein.

— Bob Herbert, "Cigs Need New Lenny," *New York Daily News*, October 16, 1990.

CRAFT A STRONG STATISTICAL ARGUMENT

Fortunately, good statistical evidence, presented well, can be used in the media to make clear the social dimension of tobacco use, and the stake that we all have in addressing the problem. To do this successfully is no easy task. Advocates must find evidence and craft arguments that are clear and easy to grasp; relevant, truthful, and plausible in their implications; and attention-getting—interesting, surprising, or otherwise engaging enough that the media will report them.

Advocates need to craft arguments rigorously using the research of others, including research that may have been developed for purposes very different from tobacco control advocacy. The challenge is to find a claim that is both appropriate to your advocacy objective, and fully supported by evidence, so that it cannot be undermined.

Before you tell your story, be sure that it is accurate and compelling. Be sure you understand the strengths and weaknesses of your data. For this, you will need to rely on the statisticians who developed the data and analysis you are using.

Psychology professor Robert Abelson, in his book *Statistics as Principled Argument*, developed a series of criteria for evaluating the quality of an argument made with statistics. We have derived the following questions from Abelson's work; you can use them to ensure that your argument will engage your audience:

1. Have I identified facts that significantly illuminate my issue?
2. Can I clearly and specifically articulate these facts, and explain how they are derived and supported?
3. If I am making a cause-and-effect argument, are there exceptions to it? Can I identify them?
4. Will the facts or arguments I am presenting help to change the audience's view of my issue in an important way?
5. Are the facts or arguments I am presenting credible and rigorously derived?

The following techniques should help you frame an argument that will let you answer "yes" to all of the above questions.

Stay Focused: Don't Try to Tell Every Story

You may have found a study that provides a wide variety of interesting data—for example, an analysis of the numbers and kinds of tobacco ads found in proximity to schools, and the kinds of stores and signs that display them. All of this information may be useful to you in various aspects of your policy work, but for any given effort, keep in mind that most of the public is not engaged closely enough with your issue to want to know all of the nuances.

Identify the *one* finding that will most clearly change your audience's perception of the issue, and then promote the need for change. If they need to know four different numbers to get your point, you are on the wrong track.

Example: In October 1995, the Federal Trade Commission's annual report on tobacco consumption, sales, and promotion identified a record spending level on advertising and promotion, provided a wide variety of new data about tobacco industry practices, and disclosed the largest decline in cigarette sales in the last 30 years.

While much of this information was newsworthy, advocates focused attention on one statistic—the near doubling of spending on promotional "specialty items" (T-shirts, hats, etc.). This particular number made clear to the audience the industry's effort to target children. Just as important, it made the link to the need for Federal regulation—then proposed by the Food and Drug Administration—that would end distribution of such items.

Cigarette companies spent $756 million on the distribution of specialty items in 1993, an increase of more than $416 million from 1992. Since these specialty items are distributed primarily by mail, at promotional events, and through catalogue orders, there is no way to ensure consistently that these products are limited to adults.

A 1995 survey of nearly 6,000 California retailers found that stores displayed an average of about 25 tobacco ads and promotions per store—many aimed at youth. About half of the ads are near the candy rack and more advertisements appear outside stores near schools than at other locations.

Take a good look at the cigarette ads offering free T-shirts, posters, and other toys. The tobacco companies say these "cool" items don't encourage kids to smoke—what do you think?

Interpret the Numbers: Social Math

Turning statistics into useful advocacy tools requires relating them both to the policy issue you seek to advance, and to the audience you wish to persuade. The process of converting data into easily understandable information that communicates its relevance to an issue has been termed "social math." It is fundamentally a creative process, well-suited to a group brainstorming session. The objective is to associate the statistics with an image or statement that makes your point vivid and compelling, but without distorting or overstating the data.

Several techniques effectively turn statistics into strong, rigorous statements with statistics:

Humanize the Numbers

In this country of over 250 million people, social problems come in thousands of people, millions and billions of dollars, and numbers of years. Big numbers such as these are hard to relate to on a personal level.

Take those large-scale numbers and put them in contexts or units that audiences can understand: Divide annual figures by smaller units of time. Compare the magnitude of the figure with a more familiar number, either to show a great contrast, or a surprising similarity.

Example: The Federal government estimates that 400,000 people die each year from tobacco-related disease. By dividing by the days in a year, we find that, on average, 1,100 die each day from tobacco. To put the magnitude of that figure

into a context, we can equate the effect of tobacco-related illness with 2 jumbo jet crashes per day, killing everyone on board, every day of the year.

A further division of the annual figure reveals that approximately 45 people die every hour from tobacco in the United States—or about one every 79 seconds.

Another way to present this figure is to tell a member of Congress that "about 1,000 people will die in your district each year as a result of tobacco use." This not only "humanizes" the figure, by bringing it down to a more comprehensible scale, it also identifies Congress's responsibility and jurisdiction regarding this national death toll—calling for a policy response.

Every day, more than 3,000 adolescents in the United States smoke their first cigarette, taking the first step toward becoming regular smokers by the time they reach adulthood. Though cigarette advertising and promotion declined in 1994, the industry continues to spend at a mind-boggling pace: over 13 million dollars ($13,233,000) ***per day****; over a half-million dollars ($551,400)* ***per hour****; and over nine thousand dollars ($9190.00)* ***per minute****—every minute, around the clock.*

Move from the Quantitative to the Qualitative

Many statistics are so abstract or unfamiliar that they make people's eyes glaze over. But such numbers can often be used effectively by making a simple qualitative comparison (more/less, bigger/smaller) with another figure. This can focus their attention away from the technicalities of numbers, and onto the substance of your argument.

Example: Cigarette smoking causes more premature deaths than do all of the following combined: AIDS, cocaine, heroin, alcohol, fire, automobile accidents, homicide and suicide.

Bring the Story Home

Identify the specific impact of your data on your community. This makes the numbers more relevant and brings attention to the social dimension of the problem. Since most folks identify more closely with their own town or city than with the state or nation as a whole, they can more readily grasp the need for collective action to address it.

Example: Knowing that 400,000 Americans die each year from tobacco-related illness, you can project the number of deaths that will occur in your community in the same period. Simply divide the population figure for your community by the population estimate for the United States (many such figures are available through the U.S. Census Bureau web site), and multiply by 400,000. Keep in mind, however, that such figures do not reflect demographic variations in smoking prevalence across the country, and are thus only rough projections.

The national death toll from tobacco suggests that about 150 of our neighbors here in the Springfield, Illinois, area will die as a result of tobacco use this year—one every 2.5 days. [based on 1994 Census figures]

Make Your Numbers Sing!: The Right Analogy

Even after you have used a social math technique to convert your statistic into a form the audience can grasp, it's critical to link your fact(s) with the policy change you propose. A particularly effective way to drive home your argument is to make an analogy to an issue that the public has already addressed.

> Example: We know that tobacco could kill about 150 Springfield citizens in a year. If a notorious drug dealer had caused 150 deaths from heroin and crack cocaine in a year, the city would surely take action. Don't the dangers of tobacco—and the promotional seductions of the tobacco industry—deserve the same attention?

Accentuate the Positive: The Gains

Though many important statistics deal with the social costs of tobacco, it's important to avoid "hand-wringing" over these often devastating facts. Whenever possible, return to a positive focus by emphasizing the pro-health impact that policy changes can bring.

> Example: While the new regulations designed to protect children and adolescents from tobacco will create new costs (projected by the Food and Drug Administration at up to $185 million annually), they will result in lower health care costs, longer lives, and increased productivity, valued by FDA at a minimum of $9 billion each year.
>
> This means that each dollar spent annually to meet the regulations would result in at least 48 dollars in social benefits—a great dividend on the dollar!
>
> *The small investment in tobacco regulations will pay off in longer lives and better health for millions of Americans. New generations will grow up free of tobacco addiction, and of the debilitating diseases that result. These gains are priceless for individual families. And since each dollar spent to meet the regulations could result in 48 dollars worth of social benefits, they are a sound investment for the nation as a whole.*

Don't Stretch the Data Too Far: Credibility

If you've come up with a great-sounding explanation of your new figure, but the numbers don't quite work, don't put yourself on a ticking time-bomb of embarrassment and lost credibility. Someone will find the flaw in your argument, and your clever effort to frame your issue will end up looking dumb or deceitful. You will, too.

> Example: In February 1990, Perrier mineral water was recalled nationwide because it was found to be contaminated with benzene. Advocates compared the level of benzene in cigarette smoke to the amount in the tainted drink, and found that one would have to drink more than 50 servings of recalled Perrier to get the same amount of benzene as from a single pack of cigarettes.
>
> In a hearing later that year, Congressional staff used other data to make the same comparison, and came up with a far more dramatic figure—that cigarette smoke contained 2,000 times the benzene in the Perrier. Unfortunately, the figure they used for benzene in tobacco was not related

to the amount consumed in smoking; an Environmental Protection Agency technician termed the methodology used "completely specious."

While this figure could have led pro-tobacco interests to attack the credibility of the Congressional analysis, the only result was confusion among a few tobacco-prevention advocates, since the erroneous figure didn't get enough attention to be worth challenging.

Be Sure About the Data: Fail Safe

Your oppponent will be nitpicky and look for some way to discredit your statistics. The good news is you can prevent statistical disasters with careful work and attention to detail. Make sure that the comparisons and conversions you use are rigorous, and when in doubt, do not use them. If you have to do additional math, be sure it's right. When possible, check with an expert (such as the author of the study or report you cite) to be sure that you haven't mischaracterized anything.

And remember: even if you've done everything right, you will likely face a series of challenges to a controversial claim, both from skeptical reporters and your opponents on the issue. Be ready to cite the sources, provide copies of the study, and explain how you converted your figures. If you have time, it's a great idea to put together a one-pager ahead of time that does this job, so that you can quickly distribute it to those who have questions.

② *Find the Facts You Need*

Sometimes you begin by knowing what you want to do with statistics, but you have to find the right ones to do the job. Fortunately, there are a variety of publicly available sources that you can use to find pertinent statistical information that can further your own policy objectives directly, and provide a context for your efforts to a more general audience:

- Social Science Research
- Government Resources
- Advocacy Groups and Other Stakeholders
- Opinion Polling
- Internet
- Currently Reported Data

As you begin to explore sources, you will be confronted with a dizzying array of materials—probably more than you can deal with at once. To narrow your search, keep a series of questions in mind that will help you to identify the kind of information you want. Some important ones include:

- **What specific policy change am I advocating?** (Clean indoor air policies? A vending machine ban? Advertising/marketing restrictions?)
- **What is the concrete measure of the problem that the policy addresses?** (Advertising dollars? The average age that smokers begin using tobacco? Stores that sell tobacco to minors? Children's awareness of tobacco brand names and advertising?)
- **What is the quantifiable impact of that problem?** (Deaths? Illness? Lost productivity?)
- **Is there a strong association between two phenomena that I need to demonstrate to show the need for a policy change?** (i.e., nicotine and addiction; tobacco promotion and consumption; tobacco political contributions and legislators' policy positions)
- **Where have similar policies been used successfully in the past?** (In a locality, or another country? In a different but analogous policy area? As part of a government demonstration project?)

Social Science Research

Most disciplines publish research in journals geared to other specialists in their field, including epidemiology, medical and public health research, economics, and public policy. Such journals are available at university and professional school libraries, and are usually indexed in specialized catalogs.

Government Resources

The Federal government conducts large-scale ongoing research on the health status of Americans. Two of the most valuable projects for tobacco control advocates are the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) and the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), both administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The BRFSS is a monthly telephone survey conducted in each of the 50 states, and is designed to provide data to support tobacco control and other health promotion efforts. State health departments are able to customize part of the survey to issues of special importance in their state. Each month, CDC compiles the results and shares them with all states. The system provides an excellent source of up-to-date information on tobacco use and other disease-related behaviors affecting the nation.

The NHANES is a periodic survey, based on physical exams and other objective measures, of the health and nutritional status of the American population. The most recent available survey data was completed in 1994. Over 30 topics were explored, including environmental tobacco smoke and lung disease. While summary reports are available from

the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, most of the specific findings are published in the professional medical and epidemiological journals.

In addition to the research discussed above, the Federal government, and to a lesser extent state and local governments, provide a wealth of useful information to the public, much of it free of charge. Government Printing Office bookstores sell a variety of publications developed by Federal agencies. The Bureau of Health Statistics maintains a variety of important information on health status, including tobacco prevalence data. Many agencies also conduct research designed to evaluate their own policies and programs. And the General Accounting Office, the investigative arm of Congress, publishes reports on a plethora of potential legislative issues.

Key tobacco resources include:

- Center for Disease Control's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*
- Surgeon General's series of reports on tobacco and health
- Federal Trade Commission's annual report on tobacco sales, advertising, and promotion

Advocacy Groups and Other Stakeholders

Many advocacy groups and others involved in tobacco control (the National Center for Tobacco-Free Kids and the American Cancer Society, for example) conduct or compile research. If you know of a group that is engaged in your issue, call or write them and request a publications list; they may have just what you need!

Opinion Polling

In many cases, opinion data that demonstrate widespread concern about a social problem, or support for a needed change, can be extremely effective in making your case. Groups such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the University of Michigan Survey Research Center, and the American Cancer Society frequently conduct public opinion survey of tobacco-related issues. Contact them to get copies of their latest findings.

You can also do your own polling! A variety of commercial opinion research organizations conduct regular surveys on a weekly or monthly basis; you can add a question or series of questions to these surveys for a fee.

THE INTERNET

Don't Forget the Net! Many of the resources cited above are available on the World Wide Web. Even when the materials themselves are not directly available, the Internet can save you time by helping you narrow your search. There are also a number of Web sites maintained by tobacco control organizations that provide links to useful information.

One good place to start your on-line search is the home page of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health Statistics:

http://www.cdc.gov/nchswww/nchshome.htm).

It provides on-line access to summary findings from the BRFSS and NHANES, as well as an electronic edition of the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. It also provides links to the Web sites of state health departments and other health resources, and up-to-date news releases on public health issues. It is well worth exploring for current tobacco-related information.

CURRENTLY REPORTED DATA

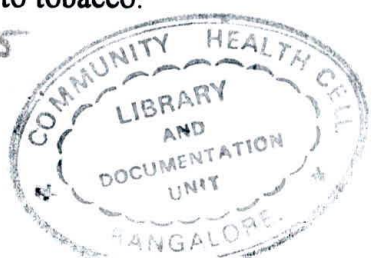
While identifying new data in support of your position is always helpful, it's sometimes most important to deal with statistics that are already part of the debate. Later in this Advisory we will discuss ways of responding to your opponent's use of statistics. In many cases, however, significant new data announced by government and/or reported in the media needs to be reframed to reveal their impact and communicate your message.

Example: As explained above, the estimated annual death rate from tobacco (400,000 per year in the United States) has been used many different ways to emphasize the impact of tobacco use for many different advocacy efforts and specific localities.

You know your specific tobacco control policy objective, so you probably have a good idea of what you're looking for. But use these questions as a spur to think creatively; you may be surprised at what you can find!

Example: The British magazine *The Economist* uses what it calls "the Big Mac index," a comparison of the price of a MacDonald's Big Mac in different countries around the world, as an indicator of the valuation of various world currencies. This analogy translates the abstract subject of currency exchange rates into terms that every reader can quickly and intuitively grasp.

Similarly, tobacco advocates could compare the price of a similarly popular consumer product with the price of a pack of cigarettes to make an argument for increased tobacco taxes. Making the right comparison could illustrate the kinds of choices that children are making when they consider buying their first pack of cigarettes, thus emphasizing the purpose of the tax policy: to decrease youth access to tobacco.



Today, children can go into a convenience store and buy either a pack of cigarettes or a magazine for about the same amount of money. With the proposed tax increase, the cigarettes would cost almost twice as much—and a lot more kids would choose the magazine over the cigarettes.

③ *Answer Your Adversary*

Just as important as presenting your own information is identifying and answering the distortions made by your opponents in the debate. In fact, the presentation of misleading or incomplete information by others provides a prime opportunity for you to make your case. This section provides some useful techniques for convincingly and specifically refuting the claim in question, and for presenting the relevant correct information in ways that bring the audience back to the social dimension of the issue, and the need for policy change.

We were used to bringing scientists out of the woodwork and have this particular lab do this, and we'd have a poll polled by some cockamamie pollster saying this, that or the other. . . . just to show . . . that the jury's still out, that you shouldn't take away anybody's civil rights until you're absolutely sure what you're doing. How can you be absolutely sure when this, this XYZ laboratory, world famous laboratory... Why is it world famous? Because I said it is and nobody's checked.

—Victor Crawford, former Tobacco Institute lobbyist, who became a tobacco control advocate after being diagnosed with throat cancer, speaking of the tactics he used to kill tobacco control bills. ("Confessions of a Tobacco Lobbyist," *60 Minutes*, March 19, 1995)

So the tobacco companies...when they cannot get the fact they need they take it out of context. When they cannot take it out of context, they lie. That is something you need to know and not be afraid to say.

—Stanton Glantz

Call the Foul

If you see a figure or finding that seems suspicious to you, begin by examining it closely and identifying its flaws precisely. Obtain a copy of the source material that backs up the claim you are challenging. You will want to know both the source and the methodology behind the statistic. If those making the claim can't provide this to you, be suspicious. Ask a reporter to review the claim and its supporting methodology with an independent expert. (This is still a good thing to ask if you do obtain the material, but haven't had time to thoroughly examine it before discussing it with the media.)

As you read through the documentation, ask yourself the following questions:

1. **Does the evidence really support the claim?** Studies are often used to support a claim that has nothing to do with the study. (Example: Evidence about tobacco use from countries that have never permitted tobacco advertising shed little, if any, light on the impact of marketing restrictions in countries where advertising has long been prevalent.)

2. **If the source was a study, was it conducted by a reputable scientist?** Does the author have economic ties to the tobacco industry? Was the study published in a professional journal, or otherwise peer-reviewed? Do the findings conflict with a large body of other scientific evidence? (Example: When an Environmental Protection Agency committee was developing its report identifying environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) as a carcinogen, the tobacco industry repeatedly claimed that the group was "ignoring" a study finding no link between ETS and cancer. In fact, EPA considered the study's findings, despite the fact that it had not been published in a professional journal, but made only limited use of it because its supporting data were insufficient.)

3. **If the source was a survey, are the questions "honest," or do they lead respondents to the answers that the surveyors were looking for?** Who was actually surveyed? Does the sample reflect the population as a whole (by age, gender, ethnicity, economics, etc.)? Watch especially for survey forms that are filled out by respondents and returned. The results of such surveys reflect the views not of those who received it, but those who were willing to fill it out and send it back—a very different group!

4. **Is the *publicized* version of the claim actually backed up by the data, or is it characterized in a false or misleading way?** (Example: While a 1989 Tobacco Institute ad campaign claimed that "[a] majority of Americans do not support smoking bans," the polling data actually showed that 74% of respondents favored separate sections for smokers and nonsmokers, and another 24% supported a total ban of smoking in restaurants. Only 2% supported no restriction on restaurant smoking.)

5. **Does the claim make sense?** Putting all of the pieces together, does the argument being made fit the reality of the public problem you are talking about? If it doesn't, you need to identify why not: what's misleading or unfair, why an analogy is false, or what important information has been left out that puts the information in context.

When you are comfortable that you have found the flaws that raised your concern, write them out in a form that you can use to communicate with your audience. List a couple of bulleted points that briefly and clearly explain the error in reasoning that you have found. If you need to cite additional evidence in making your point, get that together as well; but, include in the bullets only the evidence you need to explain your argument. Add supporting material on back-up pages, if necessary. Be careful not to get mired in the details; if the reporter can't grasp your point on the first reading, she could dismiss it out of hand.

Remember, your claim will be even more closely scrutinized than the one you are taking to task, so make sure all of your arguments are rock-solid, clear, and succinct. Keep the media's point-of-view in mind: in challenging your opponent, you are probably taking a story that was easy-to-tell and was practically pre-written for the reporter, and making it more complicated and difficult. Don't give the reporter any excuses to ignore your evidence.

GET PAST "YOU'RE WRONG!"

Being clear and forceful in pointing out flaws in an opponent's claim is important, but don't let the disagreement degenerate into a shouting match or dissipate into a "difference of opinions" of equal merit. Show not only why a factual claim is erroneous or misleading, but why the correction is significant to the issue.

First, ask yourself: Why did they make the claim in the first place? Point this reason out clearly, and show how discrediting the claim strengthens your position. Be explicit—what's obvious to you may not be to your audience!

> Example: The tobacco industry says many studies show no evidence of a link between tobacco and disease. In fact, almost all scientists not funded by the industry recognize a clear link between the two, using the same methodologies that are widely accepted for other health risks. But the key point here is that the industry has suppressed and manipulated its own studies to suggest that an honest debate about these risks exists where, in fact, there isn't one. That's why they aren't credible on this or *any* scientific issue.

KEEP BATTING!

In answering your adversary, don't get trapped within the terms of debate defined by the adversary. Don't let your opponent box you in to simply picking at his or her claim; attend to getting your own message out at the same time. This is another prime opportunity to turn the focus to the social dimension and to the need for policy change to address the problems of tobacco use.

Example: "While my opponent sits here claiming that tobacco advertising is intended only for adults, we know that thousands of children are exposed to advertising images that equate smoking with maturity, attractiveness, and being 'cool.' And the scientific evidence shows that this advertising influences their decision to begin smoking. No matter what the tobacco industry claims to *intend*, we can't afford the *effects* that such advertising has in promoting tobacco use among children right at the ages when most smokers become addicted."

The industry loves to argue about methodology in studying the health risks of environmental tobacco smoke even though they're wrong, because it takes attention away from the real issue: How do we reduce this well-documented health hazard with a strong public health strategy?"

④ *TAKE THE HIGH GROUND*

As noted above, professor Robert Abelson describes statistics as a form of "principled argument." In this advisory, we have focused mostly on the "argument" part—on how to incorporate statistical information into messages that communicate, persuade, and inspire public action in others. It's useful in closing to reiterate the "principles" of truth, fairness, and accuracy that undergird these strategies, and the practical purposes that they serve in public interest advocacy.

It is all too commonly believed today that "you can say anything with numbers." In part, this results from a general skepticism about the validity of our public debate. But it also stems from a long standing and unfortunate tendency for many to use figures in careless, incorrect, or misleading ways. Statistics and scientific findings lend an aura of "objectivity" to an argument. For those who have the ability to saturate an audience with their message through paid media or other high-priced communications strategies, adding a number or two is a cheap way to add credibility without a serious risk of challenge.

Furthermore, credibility is less important for pro-tobacco advocates, since they are working to tell stories that are in many ways "ready made" for the media—focused on individual responsibility and personal choice. As a tobacco control media advocate, your objective is to direct attention to the social nature of the tobacco problem, and the need for policy solutions to address it.

The reality, of course, is that some numbers are right and some are wrong; some claims are factual and some are not. This distinction is a critical tool for those of us who don't have the money or power to simply steamroll their position into public awareness. As we argued above, you can counter the misleading claims of others not only to set the record straight, but to advance your own cause.

To be able to use this strategy consistently, however, your own information must be free of error and bias. If the media or policymakers find that your information isn't credible, they won't listen a second time. And if your opponent successfully challenges your claims, then you're left in a shouting match—and the other guy or gal can probably afford a louder megaphone.

Since your efforts are a challenge to the media's tendency to deal in personalized, individual stories, you have a special *self*-interest in being careful with facts and figures. Bad information and false claims give media gatekeepers an excuse to ignore you.

Blowing Away the Smoke:
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A Project of the Advocacy Institute

GETTING THE MESSAGE RIGHT: USING FORMATIVE RESEARCH

Advisory No. 3

THE MESSAGE, THE RIGHT MESSAGE

Political actors in this country, from Presidents to grassroots activists, are preoccupied—some would say obsessed—with getting out the "right message." No White House day can now start without setting the all-important media "line of the day."

Ethel Klein is both a noted political scientist and one of the leading media strategists for public health advocacy campaigns on issues ranging from spousal abuse to handgun control. When issue advocates sit around a table to talk "message," she laments, they invariably rush to hatching catchy slogans and clever sound bites. Or they concoct elaborate arguments to answer all the arguments put forward by their adversaries. Klein offers a different vision:

> *Good sound bites, and slogans—and speeches, policy solutions, meaningful statistics, arguments—all support and reinforce your message, but they are not what communications experts mean by 'message.' To communications professionals, your message is the 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 to the heart.*

STAYING ON MESSAGE

Political candidates are constantly nagged by their media consultants to "stay on message." And the great sin of campaigning is to "step on your message." What do media consultants mean when they exhort their political or public relations clients, above all to "stay on message"? and why is that so important?

In short, it is important to stay on message because that's the way you control what gets said, rather than reacting to what others are saying. If you are reacting to others or saying a couple of different things, people won't hear you.

More specifically, staying on message helps you **saturate** a message. It takes a lot of repetition for people to hear you. If people keep hearing the same things from you, you increase the likelihood that they will get it.

Also, when you are on message, you are less vulnerable to attacks or distractions from your opponents. If you are using a lot of different messages or responding to others' messages, you have many more points of vulnerability. Using fewer messages allows you to think through the different things people could say to you and how you are going to respond.

Of course, advocates have to be prepared with effective answers to the industry's arguments, and to other questions and challenges raised by journalists. But at the heart of media advocacy is the need to change the subject whenever possible *to* the themes and messages that work for you and *away from* the themes and subjects the opposition wants to talk about.

That's why we all need to hear a small inner voice constantly reminding us, "Don't argue. Don't debate. Change the subject if you need to, but **stay on message!**"

DEVELOPING THE MESSAGE

The campaign message must be the product of a deliberate process. We need to constantly remind ourselves that media advocacy is a tool or craft in the service of advocating policy change. So no message should spring from our fertile creative brains—until we take the pedestrian route of answering the following key questions:

1. *What do we want?*

   What is our specific objective: A vending machine ban? The deep-sixing of the dreaded preemption clause imbedded in a seemingly innocuous state bill? Comprehensive FDA regulation of tobacco industry access to kids?

2. *Who has the power to make it happen?*

   The city council? The state legislature and governor? The President and Congress?

3. *What do they need to hear?*

   Do members of the city council need to hear that vending machine laws will really keep cigarettes out of the hands of many young children? Or do they already know that, but now need to hear that the law is sound and safe from legal attack? Or do they need to hear most that voters want this law, and that a good number of them may vote for another candidate if the ban isn't approved?

USING FORMATIVE RESEARCH TO DEVELOP THE MESSAGE: FOCUS GROUPS AND POLLING

The focus group process is a conversation designed to find openings to the minds of people, the "frames" and language to which they are most responsive. The participants will be chosen from those voters who have not thought much, nor systematically, about tobacco issues; voters who commonly harbor conflicting and contradictory feelings about issues we think are self-evident (unless the purpose of the focus group is to seek ways to energize and mobilize the already committed "grassroots").

Six such focus group conversations with typical Americans were conducted by the Boston firm of Martilla and Kiley for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Smokeless States Initiative in early 1995. They produced at least one startling insight: People are not particularly moved by the spectacle of teenage smokers, nor are they inclined to hold tobacco company advertising accountable for teenage smoking. Their attitude seems to be, "What do you expect from teenagers?"!

However, in the face of evidence that children are starting to smoke at younger and younger ages, typical Americans are very much concerned about pre-teen and early teen smoking. And they are capable of outrage when focused on cigarette advertising and marketing, like Joe Camel ads and promotions, that they see as appealing to these very young people.

The focus groups also forced the tobacco control strategists to recognize that they are fundamentally different from most of their fellow Americans. As the polls revealed, most Americans, when pressed for an opinion, support tobacco prevention policy initiatives. But the focus groups remind us that most people just don't think about tobacco policies very much, don't walk around shaking their fists at tobacco companies, and don't pay much attention to the stories we find riveting.

Other polling and focus group data at that time revealed that:

- Americans had absorbed well the scientific judgment that tobacco use was not only lethal but a true addiction.

- Tobacco companies were truly disbelieved and scorned.

- Americans had become increasingly disgusted with the role of "special interest" money in political campaigns, and tobacco was one of the first "special interests" that leapt to their minds.

A CASE STUDY

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a Robert Wood Johnson project, was launched in the fall of 1995 to support and promote the proposed Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tobacco regulations.

1. The Objective. The answer to the first question was clear: Pass *the proposed FDA regulations—undiluted.*

2. The Target Audience. The answer to the second question was straightforward: *The President and Congress.*

After President Clinton expressed strong support of the FDA rules, the focus shifted to the Congress—and the very real fear that the Congressional leadership, with both fierce anti-regulatory animus and close ties the tobacco industry, would act to derail the regulations. It was Congress that held the power to let the FDA act—or stop the FDA in its tracks.

To make members of Congress believe that any action by them to kill the tobacco regulations could provoke an angry voter backlash, lawmakers needed to perceive that at least some voters were, indeed, paying attention to the issue.

It is important to note that the goal was not to convince a majority of voters to support the FDA rule. When asked, a majority did support the FDA. But not many individuals felt passionately about the issue and were poised to take action. Nor was it a priority for them, the way that gun control issues are for millions of National Rifle Association members.

The Campaign's audience had to be primarily those individuals who already supported the issue, but needed to be aroused and focused. In political campaign terms, the audience was the "base" of supporters, and the media advocacy objective was to "mobilize the base."

Their messages were designed to do just that.

3. The Message. The answer—or answers—to the third question was more complex and challenging. In broad terms the answer to this question had to be: *Whatever makes Congressional leaders think twice before doing the tobacco industry's dirty work.*

Members of Congress had to hear messages to convince them that attempting to stop the FDA was politically risky. So for tobacco control advocates, the challenge was to develop a message, or several sharply focused messages, that would achieve that objective. To help craft such messages, advocates turned to available formative research such as polling and focus group testing and drew from their own extensive policy advocacy experience. They came up with four key organizing themes:

> *Cigarette smoking is, in FDA Commissioner David Kessler's words, "a pediatric disease." It's not only teenagers who are taking up smoking, but kids— 9-, 10-, and 11-year-olds. And more and more of them are smoking at younger and younger ages.*
>
> *Cigarette smoking is addictive, and the tobacco companies manipulate the addictive nicotine in cigarettes deliberately to make sure their cigarettes hook kids and keep them addicted.*
>
> *Tobacco companies have lied to the public for 30 years. They have known about the hazards of smoking, and they have lied about it. They have known that nicotine is a true addictive drug, and they have lied about it. They target their advertising and promotions to young people, and they have lied about that.*

> *To keep public health authorities like the FDA from protecting kids from the tobacco companies' reach, the companies have poured millions of dollars into political campaigns, corrupting our democracy.*

The Campaign embarked on a media campaign that sounded these four themes. The media campaign, "America's Kids Are Not For Sale," called on all political candidates to "renounce and refuse" tobacco campaign contributions. The Campaign ran a series of paid advertisements in those papers that Congress reads (the *Washington Post, New York Times,* and *Roll Call*).

While the Campaign messages called upon members to pledge to refuse tobacco campaign money, the Campaign's leaders well understood that there was little chance that the key Congressional leaders would do that, given their long and deep addiction to tobacco money. But by framing tobacco money as so inherently corrupting that no decent politician should touch it, the Campaign sought to make the Congressional leaders fear that any action by them to stop FDA would be seen by the media, and the voting public, as a payoff for the tobacco dollars they *were* taking. And that's a message that fits the objective of message development—creating messages that are logically persuasive, morally authoritative, and capable of evoking passion.

The Campaign also seized every opportunity during the Presidential primary season, which coincided with a critical session of Congress, to highlight tobacco industry campaign contributions and political ties between the tobacco lobby and Congressional leaders. Their messages kept the spotlight on Congress and enhanced the stench of tobacco money and influence—stories calculated to rouse the ire of those voters who already distrusted both tobacco companies and Congress.

How much impact these messages actually had on the Congressional leadership can never be known. But, as the election year progressed, tobacco money was never far from the news. And Congress never moved to act to block the FDA.

In the case study, the Campaign stayed on message; it did not allow itself to sidetrack its own messages by arguing with the messages of the tobacco industry public relations machinery:

- *President Clinton is once again giving federal bureaucrats the power to tell states, cities, parents, and the private sector how to do their jobs.*
- *Tobacco products are already overregulated. More than nine federal agencies that currently regulate tobacco in all 50 states have tobacco youth access laws on the books.*
- *This government power grab should send a cold shudder through all American businesses and consumers. Today's government villain is tobacco. Tomorrow, chocolate, caffeine, or cholesterol could be the FDA's next convenient foe.*
- *Big Brother has again chosen a federal approach to family and local problems.*

No doubt the tobacco industry's polling and focus group research confirmed the public's rising frustration and antipathy toward government and encouraged their message developers to use the free-market libertarian rhetoric sampled above. However, the Martilla and Kiley focus group data provide some clues about why the industry's libertarian messages fell flat. While most people have little love for government, they are willing to soften this stand when it relates to children. At the same time, the public does not trust the tobacco industry.

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LESSONS FROM THE FRONTLINES: TOBACCO CONTROL MEDIA ADVOCACY IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

Advisory No 4

Targeted marketing. Billboard advertising. These are just two of the issues tobacco control activists in communities of color use to attract grassroots interest in changing tobacco policies. Thanks to their innovative work, more and more people are becoming aware that tobacco control is more than a medical issue—it is a health issue with socio-political ramifications for race and justice.

Much of the success of these advocates results from their savvy of the relationship between the media and grassroots organizing. These activists use media to support their organizing efforts, but don't expect the media to mobilize people for them. Therefore, organizing goals (e.g., winning the issue, numbers of people engaged) are the priority. Media goals (getting coverage, relationships with reporters, etc.) are important, but primarily as a means of achieving these organizing goals.

This advisory explores a number of lessons learned from the synergistic relationship between media advocacy and effective community organizing:

- Racism and classism are barriers to sensitive coverage of the tobacco issues in communities of color—or to getting covered at all.

- Effectively refining or "cutting an issue" so that it engages grassroots interest is essential to a campaign's success.

- Care must be taken in choosing a target—the key decision maker(s) to be influenced or pressured—as it is the most important factor in shaping the campaign strategy.

- Creative, controversial special events can get media coverage where standard media relations efforts fail.

- Alternative media, ethnic media, and other forms of community media are important resources that activists can use effectively.

- Media coverage isn't always a positive factor in mobilizing support.

Facing the Barriers

Factors such as lack of diversity in media outlets and deeply ingrained patterns of segregation in living and work patterns overall are barriers to coverage in communities of color. Conventional media advocacy typically requires a tremendous amount of reporter cultivation—building relationships with reporters through personal contact, common social settings, work relationships or by becoming a regular source for stories and information. In communities of color, meeting reporters under any of these conditions can be difficult. Some media outlets do not cover these communities regularly or only cover them in very narrow, limiting ways (i.e., crime stories).

Communities also struggle with what happens when they are covered. Media ignorance and bias can result in news stories that are negative and defamatory. As a result, many activists prefer to leave the media alone, and virtually all groups working in communities of color weigh their media outreach carefully against the possible damage that media attention could inflict.

However, these difficult conditions can still provide fertile soil for creative media advocacy in these communities. Careful, adept use of soundbites, efforts to engage the full spectrum of media (including religious and ethnic media), and the use of attention-getting press events have helped groups overcome these barriers with aplomb, and use media to further their advocacy and organizing goals.

Choosing and "Cutting" the Issue

The first decision that a grassroots campaign must make is to identify and develop the specific issue on which they wish to focus media advocacy. Activists often guide this decision with a set of criteria or questions:

- Does the issue have a high degree of community concern and stake?
- Can it mobilize enough available resources to succeed?
- Will it have the support of numerous potential allies?
- Is it specific and manageable enough to win?

However, choosing the issue is not enough. Through a process of refining or "issue cutting," advocates make clear the importance of the issue and the reasons why we should care about it.

It's important to note that cutting the issue is a bit different from framing a message. Framing is the set of activities that guides what gets said about the issue (e.g., analyzing the audience, refuting the opposition). Cutting an issue is pinpointing what piece of a problem or concern a group will take on according to a set of goals and criteria. After a decision is made about how the larger issue will be refined, then a group is ready to frame an appropriate message to support their goals.

Examples of Issue Cutting

Successful grassroots campaigns to stop Uptown cigarettes and X brand cigarettes focused on two key points: (1) the exploitation of important cultural values and institutions to sell deadly products; and (2) the potential appeal of these products to youths. In each case, it was clear to advocates that African Americans were being targeted by these companies, but targeted marketing alone was not enough of a "hook" to draw broad support. By "cutting" the issue in ways that emphasized its racial overtones and placed it within a context of ongoing efforts for socio-economic justice, advocates were able to broaden its appeal—and newsworthiness.

Another example of adept "issue cutting" is found in the Baltimore Citywide Liquor Coalition's (BCLC) efforts to ban alcohol and tobacco billboards in most areas of Baltimore. Here again, themes emphasizing youth targeting and race and class exploitation proved effective in mobilizing communities—with a local twist. The predominantly African American coalition successfully aroused the community from apathy about tobacco control by linking billboards to "bread and butter" issues of neighborhood blight, bias, and economic development.

When the Baltimore coalition chooses an issue, they apply the **WRIST** test. For every initiative they consider, they ask:

Is the issue: Winnable? Real? Immediate? Specific? Tangible?

According to BCLC organizer Kevin Jordan, issue development is one of the most important steps in developing media and organizing strategies. It will determine your allies, your target and your power base. In fact, organizers who use the WRIST criteria have a saying that illustrates its importance:

If you want to make a fist, you've got to have a WRIST.

UNDERSTANDING WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO

Having a clear understanding of your audience's stake in the issue is critical to the success of media advocacy. While media advocacy is not the same as organizing a power base, activists use the same kinds of analyses to develop their media strategy as they use in organizing. In media advocacy, there are generally two kinds of audiences:

- The primary audience, or target, is the decision maker or decision making body (public or private) to be influenced or pressured to change

- The secondary audience is composed of potential allies to be mobilized to help pressure the target.

Effective coalitions chart each potential target's and ally's self-interest, depth of concern, and risk in supporting the initiative in order to shape an effective message to draw them in. This analytical approach ensures that the media fit clearly and effectively into the overall organizing strategy.

Ask the following questions in choosing a target for organizing communities and media advocacy efforts:

Which people or institutions have the power to solve the problem and grant your demands? Identify which is the most important target for achieving your specific policy goal.

Who must you get to in order to reach those above?
What are the strengths and weaknesses of each potential target?

Which targets are appointed? elected?

What relationships or tactics give you power or influence with them (as voters, consumers, taxpayers, investors, shaming, etc.)?

What is their self-interest?

Who would have a stake or jurisdiction if you redefined the issue (e.g., turned a tobacco advertising issue into a fair business practices issue)? Does this help you?

Choosing a target goes hand in hand with identifying potential allies; advocates working in communities of color often employ a two-pronged strategy that simultaneously shames targets and catalyzes action at the community level. Successful groups take great care to choose targets over whom they have some degree of power; they exploit the targets' vulnerabilities in the media.

Planning an effective strategy also requires understanding the positions and roles that all involved will take in the public debate. After the target and allies are identified, extensive research must be done to identify each party's influence, interests, and goals with respect to the issue. Staff and volunteers at the Los Angeles-based Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, for example, comb through public reports, contribution lists, news clippings, and personal interviews to develop this information. Information is charted on the wall in a "war room" style to inform their media and organizing strategies. Others, like the Onyx Group and the California African American Tobacco Education Network rely more heavily on the Internet for this research. Using networks like SCARCNet (a tobacco control computer network managed by the Advocacy Institute), Compuserve's Public Health Forum, and HANDSNet, advocates place queries on line to gather intelligence and search for related news articles.

A thorough analysis might lead a group to change their target. This shift might be from a company over which a group has little power, to a regulatory agency that has a higher degree of accountability to the public. In the case of billboard regulation, it is often much easier to get the state and local governments to act than to pressure the billboard industry into giving up a significant portion of their revenue (alcohol and tobacco advertising). In the Baltimore case, messages were shaped and directed to elected officials and the people who elect them, not billboard companies. In the case of the campaign against X brand cigarettes, on the other hand, activists chose to target the manufacturer.

Case Study: X Marks the Target

X was a cigarette brand that, in order to sell cigarettes, exploited the strong, positive sentiment that young African Americans have for Malcolm X. The brand was manufactured by a small Massachusetts company, Star Tobacco Corporation, and marketed and distributed by Duffy Distributors. X's packaging, marketing, and low price seemed to be lethal hooks the tobacco industry would use to snare more young African Americans into addiction.

The effort to stop X brand cigarettes evolved out of a network of activists who had been mobilizing African Americans and others around the targeted marketing of tobacco and alcohol products. Almost exactly five years before the X campaign, this network worked

together to stop R.J. Reynolds Company from launching Uptown cigarettes in Philadelphia in 1990 and forced Heileman Brewing Company to withdraw PowerMaster malt liquor in 1991. Both products appeared to target African American communities. This network was formalized as the National Association of African Americans for Positive Imagery (NAAAPI) at a national meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina in early 1991.

Mobilizing the Community. Mobilization for the X campaign began when Brenda Bell-Caffee, director of the California African American Tobacco Education Network (AATEN), saw a message about the brand posted on SCARCNet. She immediately alerted the NAAAPI network to develop a strategy for cutting the issue and identifying audiences. The group concluded that the two small companies that manufactured and marketed the cigarettes were more vulnerable and winnable targets than any relevant public agencies. Therefore, the organizing strategy focused pressure and attention on these companies. In addition, the group issued the companies a 10-day deadline to withdraw the brand.

Involving the Media. The media played a critical role in furthering the effort by getting the word out; articles on X appeared in more than 100 newspapers nationwide. Bell-Caffee, the Onyx Group's Charyn Sutton, and Brandy Griffin (then of Le Grant Communications, a public relations firm, contracted to do AATEN's media) approached African American and corporate-owned media outlets with the story. Bell-Caffee had strong relationships with African American-owned publications through her years as a reporter for the *Sacramento Observer* and found the *Observer* and other newspapers in the West Coast Publishers Association (a regional association of African American-owned newspapers) particularly receptive.

The coalition worked to shame the target in two ways: they argued that X brand (whether purposely or not) defamed an important leader and cultural icon, Malcolm X; and they pointed out that the product was packaged in a way that was sure to attract African American youths, thus placing their health at serious risk.

Winning! Succumbing to national pressure, Duffy Distributors issued a statement one day after the deadline which—without any admission of wrongdoing—detailed their commitment to withdraw the brand. Activists were elated, but held off their celebration until after a declaration of victory in the media. Press conferences were held on both coasts, with both Sutton and Griffin issuing regional media advisories to announce the firm's decision to abandon the brand in the face of community and public health concerns.

Expanding Benefits. Although the campaign lasted a little more than 2 weeks, its impact on tobacco control recruits, media contacts, and more. AATEN found that churches and parent groups were, by far, the most receptive to their outreach efforts. As a result of the X campaign, AATEN was able to expand the number of churches participating in their

Smokefree Sunday program statewide. X helped these institutions to see the connection between tobacco marketing and tobacco-related problems by raising tobacco beyond a personal health concern and placing it on these organizations' social and political agendas:

> *This issue really touched mothers more than anyone else; especially mothers in church, organizations and PTAs. There were fathers and ministers, Black Student Union groups and others, but it was the women who really came out, who made a lot of the calls, who called AATEN to see what they could do.*
>
> --Bell-Caffee

The campaign also helped to season new tobacco control leadership, as Bell-Caffee and others honed their media advocacy skills as spokespersons. The group stayed on message, cultivated new media contacts, and kept the focus on the company—not on the stereotypical story of pathology and failing among African American youth. All of these efforts, and the fact that their targets were such small companies ill-prepared for such pressure, contributed to X's quick demise.

Planning Strategies to Access the Media

Once an issue is identified and cut, and messages are developed that will reach and influence your target, the next challenge is to gain access to the media in ways that will get your message out. For disfranchised communities that do not fit the media's primary demographic market, media access is a special challenge. Routine media advocacy approaches (i.e., cultivating and leveraging press relationships) simply are not as effective for these communities. As mentioned earlier, the lack of racial diversity in most newsrooms and the difficulties that people in low-income communities face in developing relationships with journalists are among the barriers to media access that advocates in disenfranchised communities must overcome.

The rise of market-oriented (or sales driven) reporting has resulted in more focus on affluent suburbs and less on communities with less buying power. For communities of color—particularly those with significant numbers of poor people—this means even less of an opportunity to tell stories that affect their communities.

Given these barriers, advocates have to develop creative access strategies. Press events that mobilize community support and draw out more controversial elements of issues are highly effective in attracting the media. One early strategy in the effort to regulate tobacco and alcohol billboards involved painting them over (or whitewashing) at highly publicized gatherings. Reporters came out to cover these colorful acts of civil

disobedience—especially if they thought they could catch an arrest on film. But in providing context for these dramatic events, activists focused attention on the cynical efforts of tobacco and alcohol firms to target communities of color, and the health costs and social inequities of such target marketing of dangerous products.

Other coalitions organized large-scale marches to generate media attention. Detroit Councilwoman Alberta Tinsley-Williams' Coalition Against Billboard Advertising of Alcohol and Tobacco (CABAAT) has used this strategy effectively. More recently, efforts to oppose Camel Menthol cigarettes have included sit-ins in retail establishments to draw coverage and further politicize the issue.

Case Study: Milwaukee Makes Press A Picnic

When the Milwaukee Coalition Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (MCAADA) decided to take on the overconcentration of billboards in its predominantly African American and Latino "Center City," they knew they needed media attention if their initiative was to succeed. After all, much of Milwaukee ignored the problems of the area. It seemed to many as if their neighborhoods were invisible to the press and policymakers.

Mobilizing the Community. The group knew they wanted to do a community-wide billboard count. The count, in their estimation, would encourage family participation and build awareness of the problem—while giving the coalition hard data on the issue. While a count could engage hundreds of volunteers, how could it capture the attention of the media? MCAADA found the answer by conducting the count as a one-day event.

Involving the Media. By recruiting large numbers of volunteers to form carpool teams, the coalition divided the area into smaller regions for easy counting. The event started with a rousing rally at a neighborhood park with local "celebrities." Reporters were provided a guided bus tour of the area to observe the activities—and the issue—close up. Results gathered by teams were posted on the park's scoreboard. These results not only tallied findings but they also contrasted billboard placement in Center City neighborhoods with the total number of billboards throughout the city. At the end of the day, final results were announced and MCAADA showed participants their appreciation with a picnic spread and music.

Winning. Their strategy was very successful, garnering media coverage on virtually every media outlet in the area. Thanks to MCAADA's creativity and organizing efforts, billboard regulation was on the news--and on the public policy agenda.

USING THE MEDIA'S MANY FORMS

Advocates in communities of color can gain media access by pursuing a wide range of media—much of it outside of mainstream press. For example, members of the California Latino Tobacco Education Network routinely use Spanish-language media to get the message out. California's Asian network, too, found the state's diverse Asian media an important forum for framing issues. Suc Khoe la Vang! The Vietnamese Community Health Promotion Project (VCHPP) is one of many ethnically focused projects that use Asian-language opinion pages adeptly.

In pursuing specialized media, advocates "translate" tobacco issues to reach diverse audiences in ways that are relevant to their own perspectives and concerns. VCHPP director Ahn Le routinely develops articles and op-ed pieces for California's diverse Asian-language media. Le uses these media efforts not simply to promote issues of personal health, but also to politicize tobacco in communities by linking industry practices to issues their constituents care about. To this end, Le has written numerous policy-oriented pieces including op-eds on targeted marketing and the expansion of the tobacco industry in Asia.

Advocates also work with institutional publications (i.e., newsletters and bulletins) to garner hard news coverage—a departure from their traditional purpose of promoting events. To facilitate placement, advocates write and package "camera-ready" news stories for ready insertion and publication. African American advocates report that faith publications are an important resource in this regard.

Another important source for coverage has been "alternative" media—weekly local newspapers, radio and cable programming that are committed to covering social issues. Because advocates who work in communities of color already frame their issues within larger social contexts, they are well prepared to work effectively with these outlets so they can get more in-depth coverage.

For all of these advocates, developing new ways to "get the story out" is important—especially when facing so many barriers to mainstream media attention.

INTEGRATING MEDIA INTO THE ORGANIZING CONTEXT

Because of the media's often antagonistic relationship with disadvantaged communities, advocates working in these communities must take special care never to let the media subvert the organizing goal. Media advocacy is a tool to support social change. It cannot make change in and of itself. Effective use of media advocacy requires that advocates have a clear organizing strategy of which the media are only a part. Think

of media advocacy as a microphone. It's an important tool. It amplifies your message and gets you heard. It can even capture your message and help make it a matter of record, but the message must support your goals and objectives. If it is undermined by media bias or the efforts of your opponents, it is worthless and can even be destructive.

Case Study: Knowing When to Walk Away

Occasionally, it's better to leave the media alone.

The Coalition Against Uptown Cigarettes quickly formed after news spread of RJR's plan to test market Uptown cigarettes—a brand targeting African Americans—in Philadelphia.

Mobilizing the Community. The coalition was an extremely diverse gathering of health, religious, and community organizations led by African Americans working in the Philadelphia community. They held their coalition together by agreeing on a number of basic principles, including:

- To organize broadly in the African American community, including smokers
- To focus attention on RJR and *not* other African Americans or African American organizations that might "be on the wrong side of the issue"
- To keep their goal local: to target RJR to stop test marketing the product in Philadelphia
- To focus their efforts on mobilizing the African American community around this issue.

Keeping the Media in perspective. With these understandings, the coalition saw the media primarily as a tool to mobilize their community. The local media were more important than the national media, and local media outlets that "spoke to" African Americans were more important still. Even though these principles were clear, it still was not easy to maintain this agreed-upon focus.

Immediately after the first coalition meeting, the American Cancer Society (an Uptown Coalition member) received a call from the *New York Times* requesting a list of the organizations that joined the coalition. For some, it seemed that the coalition should comply with the request right away; after all, the *Times* is a newspaper of record for this country and a media opportunity that they should not pass up. For others, it seemed too soon to publish the list. Most African American organizations needed time to go through their organization's endorsement process in order to be able to lend their formal support to the effort.

The coalition, at that time, consisted primarily of groups in the classic tobacco control movement (e.g., American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association) and was not yet representative of the broader African American community. There was concern that the story would be that this coalition was made of "the same old players" and the issue had gained little attention among broader segments of the African American community.

The group decided to wait to release the list at an upcoming press conference when more organizations could be announced. "And sure enough," says Onyx Group President Charyn Sutton, then coordinating the coalition's media, "we got other African American organizations and the *Times* didn't go away. They understood."

The group faced a similar decision when ABC's *Good Morning America* requested that a representative come on the show to debate a marketing expert on the Uptown issue. The marketing expert was African American and it was strictly against the coalition's principles to engage in any activity that would pit them against other African Americans or African American institutions in public. It was a clear call for the coalition, but less so for other tobacco control activists nationwide who thought the *Good Morning America* appearance would have been a good opportunity to promote the Uptown issue to a wider audience. The coalition stood firm; the answer was no.

In addition to turning down *Good Morning America*, the coalition also turned down other national news programs including The *McNeil-Lehrer News Hour* because their focus was on the local community. "We would go to a local newspaper before we would go national. Even though there was more glamour in the national media, it was a diversion. Our task was the local piece. Our audience is in Philadelphia. The test market was in Philadelphia and if we could win it, we would win it in Philadelphia," said Sutton.

Winning. The Uptown media effort was part of an overall plan to mobilize a community, and the media strategy thus was driven by campaign goals—not the other way around. Campaign goals informed the campaign's choice of audience, media outlets, and the composition of their coalition and coalition leadership, and they did not veer from those choices. This kind of clarity in goal setting was key to the coalition's success in keeping Uptown cigarettes from ever seeing the light of day—in Philadelphia or anywhere else. Significantly, RJR withdrew the brand nationwide. In fact, Uptown coalition's insistence on a local focus, and their unwillingness to let the issue degenerate into a debate between African Americans over "what's best for the community," contributed to national success beyond their local goals.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Clearly, the experience and expertise of those doing groundbreaking advocacy and organizing work in communities of color provide many useful lessons. But if there is one key lesson to "take home," it is that media advocacy is not a panacea. It is an effective tool for supporting policy initiatives. Like any other tool, it is most effective when used appropriately and placed in its proper context. Hopefully, advocates of all ethnicities can integrate the skills and tactics developed in communities of color into their own comprehensive strategies, including grassroots organizing, message development, and community mobilization.

In any case, groups in these communities will continue to push the envelope in tobacco control, because there is so much at stake. As the late Paul Kelly, a Chicago-based activist, put it back in 1991, "They're talking dollars. We're talking lives."

Makani Themba, Co-Director of the Praxis Project, Oakland, California, was the principal author of this advisory.

Blowing Away the Smoke:
A Series of Advanced Media Advocacy Advisories
for Tobacco Control Advocates
A Project of the Advocacy Institute

FRAMING FOR ACCESS: HOW TO GET THE MEDIA'S ATTENTION

Advisory No. 5

The news media set the public agenda: the more an issue is reported in the news, the more people are concerned about it. If you want to keep tobacco issues on people's minds, you have to continually get those issues discussed in the news. You have to get the journalists' attention.

Be pragmatic about how the news works and what you need to do to be part of it. Learn to think like journalists, to look for good stories, and bring them to journalists' attention.

Think like a journalist. Journalists can't possibly cover every important story every day. They only have a 22-minute news broadcast, or a limited number of newspaper pages, or a few minutes at a time on the radio in which to tell all the news of the day. So to get journalists' attention, we have to emphasize what's *interesting* about our stories.

Pitch stories, not issues. A reporter is far more likely to do a story on the 10 people who died today in our town of tobacco-related diseases than on the topic of death from tobacco in general.

Show why the story is newsworthy. Remember, at least two people must to want to do the story: the reporter and the reporter's editor (or TV news producer). Even if the journalist is very eager to work with you, she still must convince her editor that the piece is worth including with the rest of the day's news—and she may have to convince her editor that your story should be done instead of the one her co-worker is pitching. The more ammunition you can give her to show why your story is newsworthy, the better she will be able to argue the case for your story.

WHAT'S NEWSWORTHY?

To get journalists' attention and convince them to cover your stories, structure the stories to fit the traditional patterns of newsworthiness. Highlight the newsworthy elements. Also, the broader the audience it interests, the more likely it is to capture a reporter's attention.

Typical Newsworthy Story Elements

Controversy◆Broad Interest◆Injustice◆Irony
Local Peg◆Personal Angle◆Breakthrough◆Anniversary Peg
Seasonal Peg◆Celebrity◆Visuals◆Mystery and Drama
Human Interest◆Evergreen

Controversy

Fights are common topics for news stories. The conflict might be between politicians or political parties, or council members and constituents. Most issues a media advocate works on are controversial—after all, if no one objects to the policy being proposed, there is probably no need for a media advocacy strategy. What is the likely opposition to what your group wants to do? How would you describe it to a journalist? Think about the story line in terms of a plot and characters: are there adversaries or other tensions in the story?

For example, in some news reports tobacco control advocate Stan Glantz has been cast as "David" versus the tobacco industry's "Goliath." Consider the following headline and lead from a profile of Stan in the *San Francisco Examiner* (March 5, 1995); the dramatic conflict between the scholar and the industry is what makes this story interesting:

UCSF Professor Savors Battling Tobacco Firms
Anti-Smoking Scholar Enjoys Being A Thorn In Industry's Side

The Tobacco Institute calls him "personally offensive," "fundamentally unpleasant," and prone to personal attacks against his opponents.

But Stanton Glantz, 48, considered one of the most powerful opponents of tobacco in America, doesn't mind. He sees his battle with some of the most well-connected, moneyed corporations in the country as sport.

Broad Interest

Does your story affect a lot of people, or relate to groups of special concern such as children? The larger the number of people to whom a story is deemed meaningful, the more likely it will be covered because, ultimately, producing news is a business. A large audience means higher revenues for the news outlets because they can charge more for advertising. They seek stories that will be important or interesting to the largest possible audience. Articulate those aspects of your story that most of the audience would be concerned about, affected by, or interested in.

> For example, according to the research department at one news station, stay-at-home moms watch the news at 5:00 p.m. They care about their children (who do not watch), so stories about young children are likely to be aired in the 5:00 newscast.

Every family is involved in one way or another with tobacco use: a parent trying to quit, a teenager experimenting, a relative dying from a tobacco-related disease. This is why television producers rate tobacco stories among the highest interest stories.

Injustice

Are there basic inequalities or unfair circumstances that your story illustrates? How did the injustice occur? Who is responsible for fixing it? Exposing the consequences of an agency's or person's action is a favorite topic for news.

> A junior high school girl in Pojoque, New Mexico, emphasized injustice when she brought media attention to the fact that the alcohol and billboard industries would not remove alcohol billboards within sight of her school.[1] After news coverage publicly shamed those companies, the billboards were removed.

The behavior of the tobacco industry runs the gamut of corporate injustice, from deception before Congress to exploitive and manipulative advertising. The litigation brought by state attorneys general and others have resulted in public scrutiny of secret industry documents and conflicting testimony which continuously refuels stories about tobacco industry unjustices.

Irony

Irony is the technique of saying the opposite of what you mean—and can be the kind of dramatic contradiction that halts readers in their tracks. Is there something unexpected that makes the situation in your story different from others?

> In California, the state department of health services used irony effectively in a paid counter-ad depicting tobacco company

executives swearing in front of Congress that they do not believe nicotine is addictive. The images of the seven executives testifying creates a strongly ironic impression because their claim ran counter to the widely held belief of smokers and nonsmokers alike, that cigarettes are addictive.

Local Peg

Most news is local, whether print or broadcast. What about your story is important or meaningful to the local audience who buys the paper or watches the news? If something is going on nationally that is important to tobacco control, how does it translate in your town? How can you illustrate that connection for reporters? Even networks need a "local" example to illustrate the issue of national interest; making national stories relevant to local audiences is a primary goal of networks.

For example, in stories about how Mississippi Attorney General Michael Moore won a settlement with the tobacco industry, reporters tried to include information about whether their state's attorney general was seeking similar action. The Mississippi settlement was national news, but in other states the questions that had to be answered in news stories were: What is happening here? What is the impact of the proposed national settlement on our city or state?

Personal Angle

Most journalists seek a personal story through which to tell the news. They look for that typical case, someone who can represent an "instance" of the issue so audiences can empathize with the person and feel concern for the problem. Is there a person with direct experience with the issue who can provide an authentic voice in your story? Are they willing to speak to a reporter and have they been adequately prepared?

Any time a young person talks with a reporter after participating in a compliance check, for example, they make the story of tobacco availability easier to tell because it is no longer an abstract concept but a specific event that actually happened; someone did something against the law, a specific merchant sold tobacco to a specific underage teen. The journalist has personal details with which to write a story rather than general descriptions of an issue.

Breakthrough

A breakthrough is scientific drama, an indication that from here on, things will never be the same. Does your story mark an important historical "first" or other event? Is there evidence of change that can be highlighted?

Especially in science and medical news, if reporters can say that this is the first time something has happened, or this new information answers questions we've never been able to answer before, they are eager to tell the story. (The unfortunate consequence of this desire among news professionals is that the normally incremental process in scientific and medical research gets distorted: "breakthroughs" are reported when none are there.) If something is new or different about your story, be sure to inform the journalist about what it is and why it is important.

> When the *Journal of the American Medical Association* printed a series of reports on Joe Camel's appeal to underage smokers, news organizations across the country reported on the findings. While a Gallup poll had shown that most people already believed cigarette ads encouraged underage smoking,[2] this was the first time that a respected medical journal published research on the effects of the Camel advertising, and the breakthrough lent drama and credibility to the coverage.

Anniversary Peg

Anniversary pegs, or milestones, are markers of progress or time passed since a noteworthy event. News organizations are fond of using time markers as a reason to re-tell a story or re-examine an issue. Anniversaries are made salient by their history as news events: President Kennedy's assassination; the space ship Challenger's explosion; the Oklahoma City bombing; major earthquakes, fires and floods, and other natural disasters. Milestones can be a useful device to examine the effects of policy six months or a year after it is implemented. A local group could renew interest in the issue of ETS by issuing a report six months after a restaurant ordinance has passed to announce an increase in business after a smoking ban. What news or other events can you link to your issue? How long has it been—six months, a year—since a key news event happened? How can your story be associated with a local, national or topical historical event?

> In Vallejo, California, a group of young people increased the newsworthiness of a report on how easy it was for minors to buy tobacco by releasing it on the 25th anniversary of the first Surgeon General's report linking smoking to cancer and heart disease.

Seasonal Peg

Because news organizations want the largest audience they can find, they try to find stories on topics that affect everyone. The seasons, and holidays, affect a broad audience: everyone feels the wind or knows it is New Year's Eve. At the same time, journalists are tired of telling the same story again and again. One entertainment editor

reported on a conference of her colleagues from around the country desperate for a new way to do "Nutcracker" at Christmas time. Every year, in all sections of the newspaper and on broadcast news, reporters and editors do stories related to winter cold, summer heat, back-to-school stories at the beginning of September, Mother's Day family stories, New Year's Eve and high school graduation drinking and driving stories, Halloween giant pumpkin stories, and Thanksgiving hunger stories. Each of these times presents an opportunity for new angles on old stories if you can connect your issue for the reporter. How can your story be attached to a holiday or seasonal event?

What about a petition calling on the tobacco companies to make a New Year's resolution to givie up "image" advertising that appeals to young people? Or an April Fool's Day release contrasting the public statements of tobacco executives to conflicting internal documents?

Celebrity

Much has been written about media's attention to celebrities, which reached a heightened frenzy after Princess Diana was killed in a car crash. A celebrity might attract news attention to your issue because celebrities appeal to a large audience. A celebrity does not have to be a movie star or a national figure; a local resident with special renown can attract attention as well. Celebrities are no guarantee of attention, and it is important to be sure of what the celebrity will say, as with any public representative. Is there a celebrity already involved with or willing to lend his or her name to your issue?

> For example, Yul Brynner's death from lung cancer, and the public service ads he taped to be aired after his death, attracted attention to smoking. Baseball hero Joe Garagiola has campaigned against the association of sports with chewing tobacco. Actor Jack Klugman, whose voice evidences the ravages of throat cancer, has become a powerful spokesperson for strong regulation of tobacco marketing.

Visuals

What creative and interesting visuals can you provide with your story? Pictures, especially moving pictures, hold an exalted place on television news. Without visuals the story might not get told. "In TV," said one producer, "video dominates. Words define, shape, reference the pictures. But it's really the pictures that tell the story." An exciting visual can increase the likelihood a story will be done. Even though viewers may have read about the story in the paper or heard it on the radio, the local evening news is the first time they would *see* it. For TV news, to a large extent, story selection is determined by who has video or who can get it. On the assignment desk in one local TV newsroom, the assignment editor would respond

to story pitches by asking, "What would we see if we went there?"

> Tobacco control advocates have successfully used videotapes of young kids easily buying cigarettes from vending machines, photographs of tobacco billboards next to school playgrounds, and graphs showing the rise of tobacco industry political contributions matching the rise in teenage tobacco use.

Mystery & Drama

Are there mysterious or dramatic elements of your story that you can highlight for reporters? The more severe and dramatic, the greater the chance the story will be covered. For example, when otherwise healthy people got the Hanta virus and two days later were dead, it was covered by all the networks even though it affected relatively few people. The story was among the top ten network stories in June 1993.[3] The tragedy combined with the mystery made the story newsworthy, despite the small numbers of people affected.

> "Whistleblower" stories can create drama, as when former tobacco lobbyist Victor Crawford, dying of throat cancer, movingly confessed his transgressions and devoted his remaining days to tobacco control advocacy. *60 Minutes* lunged at the chance to tell his story.
>
> The mysterious surfacing of "secret industry documents" also creates drama and mystery. For instance, the leaked advertising campaign materials for a new cigarette called "Dakota" were targeted at "the virile 19-year-old woman."

Stories on the "secret additives" to tobacco products have also created interest and have given impetus to tobacco product regulation.

Human Interest

Human interest means stories that show tenderness, compassion, humor, or other positive human qualities. Stories about victims of lung cancer or other tobacco-related tragedies are treated as human interest stories. We care about them because we care about the condition of humanity.

> For instance, *Vanity Fair* ran an in-depth profile of Jeffrey Wigand, the former head of research and development at Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp. who blew the whistle on the company's attempt to conceal research on tobacco's addictive properties. The profile used the compelling story of the tobacco industry's campaign to discredit Wigand as a way of highlighting the themes of credibility and falsehood in wider tobacco policy battles.[4]

Giant-killing heroes, like David Kessler or C. Everett Koop, or heroic researchers like Joe DiFranza, whose studies showing young children's attraction to Joe Camel were met with industry bullying and intimidation, also make good stories.

"Evergreen"

News workers use the term "evergreen" to refer to stories that they can run any day because they are not pegged to an event and are of general interest. Such stories are useful to news organizations because they can be kept in the files indefinitely and dropped into the paper or broadcast to fill space when nothing else is pressing.

"Routine headache remedies" is an example of a medically oriented story that is important to many people but not connected to any specific time period—headaches happen all the time, so any time there is space in the news might be a good time for a story on remedies. The recent rise in teenage tobacco use in almost every community is just such a story.

Selection Process

In deciding what to cover, journalists and editors place varying importance on the different criteria of newsworthiness. These elements become more or less important depending on what else is happening, and there is always competition for journalists' attention.

Selection Criteria

The more criteria that are satisfied, the more likely the story will be chosen. Though one can identify standard criteria of newsworthiness, the story selection process is not necessarily systematic. Editors consider whether the readership will care, logistical ease of coverage, timing, and unforeseen factors.

Do I Care?

The first person the story has to be interesting to is the person who decides to do it. The journalist—or editor who assigns the story—has to care about it or believe that someone in the audience will care about it. News workers ask themselves, "Do I Care?" If the news workers care, logic allows them to assume that others in the audience would also care, and to select stories on that basis. This way, news workers believe they can anticipate what their viewers will respond to by paying attention to their own responses. As one bureau chief explained, "I like to think that anything that interests me will probably interest everybody."

Logistics

Simple concerns like parking and easy access to electrical outlets (for camera operators' lights) might influence whether a story is done, especially if there are competing stories. An assignment editor might choose which story to do based on which is easiest to do. Therefore, advocates should consider logistics from journalists' point of view when creating news events.

> For example, a San Francisco branch of the Dangerous Promises coalition, which pressured alcohol companies to remove the sexist imagery in its ads, used media advocacy to put the issue on the public's and the alcohol industry's agendas. When the coalition scouted billboard locations for its "Bloodweiser" counter-ad, organizers selected locations close to television stations rather than major freeways. Because the billboards' target audience was the leadership of the alcohol associations, not the general public, organizers wanted to make it as easy as possible for reporters to cover the story.[5]

Timing

News is immediate. The best stories are those still in progress. The urgency that characterizes a newsroom exists because everyone is eager to get the latest information on any story so it is as current as possible and relevant today. Newsrooms receive a surprising number of calls from people pitching stories that happened "yesterday." Unless there is significant interest and new information in the follow-up story, yesterday's news is not going to be covered today.

Serendipity

Serendipity plays a role in story selection because communication is not systematic in the newsroom. Inside and out, it is whom you know, whom you talk to, and what your personal interests are that guide what gets on the air and what is included in a story.

The chaotic way information travels in newsrooms is why it is useful to have many contacts at one outlet, and to deliver your information in a variety of ways to several people. The constant movement in the newsroom means one never knows whose paths will cross, or who will be assigned to a story together. Communication is often decentralized. While a distinct management hierarchy is responsible for final decisions about what is included in the news, anyone in the newsroom can and does pitch stories to anyone else.

Serendipity also means accepting that you can do everything right, and still get no coverage. If an earthquake hits the morning of your event,

or half the journalists you contacted get re-assigned by their editors, you're out of luck. If you find out early enough that something big is going to preempt your story, it may be worth postponing your event. Otherwise, toss up your hands, and better luck next time. Remember, the time you spent was not wasted, even if there was little or no coverage. The fact sheets and other background materials you provided will educate journalists, and the relationships you strengthened can help advance your issue in the future, even if your story didn't get covered this time.

How to Get in the News

Once you have identified which elements of newsworthiness are present in your story, you can begin to strategize about what type of news presence would best accomplish your goals, and how you might get that access. For instance, when an issue has not been on the public or media agenda, or when you want to mobilize the local community as well as communicate with policy makers, a colorful live press event such as a rally or festival might be best. When you have specific arguments you want to advance on an issue that is already being covered, an op-ed piece may best serve your goals.

Attention-Getting Options

The main options for getting attention to your story are to create news, piggyback on breaking news, use the editorial pages, or buy advertising.

Create News

Creating news means doing something that is worth telling a story about. It can be as simple as issuing a report, presenting a demand, or making a public announcement. News releases, news conferences and rallies are common vehicles for creating news.

> For example, in a Washington, D.C., Junior League program, 6th and 7th grade, inner-city girls counted the cigarette storefront ads and billboards they saw on their way to and from school each day. Their reports were combined and disseminated to the press with a strong message from the DC Health Commissioner, creating a good story that dramatized the impact of such advertising on kids.[6]

Be sure to use your resources wisely. Too often people rush to put on a formal media event, such as a press conference or rally. These events take a great deal of time and energy to organize; if you are going to invest those resources, first make sure that the event will be the right thing to do. Often you could get the same news effect by sending a

mailing and making follow-up phone calls, or by pitching an "exclusive" story to just one interested reporter, rather than trying to attract dozens of journalists to an event.

When deciding what kind of news event will work best for your story, or whether to a have a formal event at all, consider the following strategic questions:

Why do you want to have this event?
You should have a specific objective every time you seek media coverage. Examples include: to call attention to an issue, to call for action on the part of a government official or other target, to make the public aware of an upcoming event, to establish your organization as a credible source of information and leadership on an issue.

Is a news event the best way to reach those goals?
Sometimes you can be more effective with a mailing and follow-up phone calls to selected journalists, or an editorial board visit. It takes time and energy for reporters to come out to an event; try to save such events for occasions that will really be worth journalists' energy, and yours.

What is the objective of this specific event?
If you are certain that a news conference, demonstration, or other media event is appropriate, your next step is to focus on the outcome you want from the event. Decide*: What message do you want event attendees to walk away with*? You should have two or three focused statements incorporated into all your materials. For example, if your event dramatizes the ease of access young children have to cigarette vending machines, your recurring statement might be, "We have good laws on the books to keep this from happening but the law enforcement authorities in this city aren't enforcing them." Focusing on a single clear objective lets you make the most of the media opportunity.

Why should the media be interested in covering your event?

Reporters have to create good news stories, and you will be more likely to get coverage if you can plan in advance to provide them with newsworthy elements. Highlight the parts of your story or event that are unusual, interesting, controversial, or otherwise compelling for journalists and their audiences, as described earlier in this advisory.

Piggyback on Breaking News

Often news stories last only one day. You can expand news attention by linking a breaking news story to your issue, an effective way to attract news coverage or get a letter to the editor or op-ed printed. A breaking news story can raise the salience of an issue for media gatekeepers. For example, the death of a prominent smoker creates the opportunity to focus on the role of tobacco and disease. A national story that focuses on a relatively lesser hazard, like radon in homes, provides an opportunity to piggyback with stories on both the synergy between radon radiation and tobacco use, and the relatively greater risks of tobacco use.

When you find a breaking news story that links to your issue, an effective and relatively easy approach is to write a letter to the editor pointing out the connection between the breaking story and your issue. For example, if you see a story on state spending on medical care, you could write a letter saying that it would be more cost-effective in the long run to spend money on prevention approaches that reduce tobacco consumption in the first place.

To test out this idea, pick up a copy of your local newspaper. Carefully look through each section and look for opportunities such as the obituary of a prominent smoker:

- Can you provide facts or a perspective that would localize a national story?
- Can you expand the perspective to build on one of the local stories?

Tobacco advocates have successfully used this strategy. For example, when the federal government ordered a halt to all imports of Chilean fruit because of the discovery of cyanide on two grapes, tobacco control advocates converted this to a local story. Various communities held news conferences emphasizing that the amount of cyanide in one cigarette exceeded that found in several bushels of tainted grapes. This presentation raised the policy issue of why the government would act so quickly and restrictively on one product, while ignoring another common but more lethal product.

Use Editorial Pages

The opinion pages provide a great opportunity for advocates. There you can make a quick point and keep an issue alive. Writing a letter, even a short one, is a good way to focus your ideas and sharpen your points. If it's published, you can make it "news you can re-use" by copying the printed letter and distributing it to others—collaborative members, funders, even opponents. Seeing your ideas and name in print gives them status and credibility.

An op-ed piece gives you more opportunity to flesh out your ideas and tell a personal story. This is probably your best chance to present an extended argument to reach the decision makers you are targeting, without having to rely on a reporter to translate your ideas for you.

Don't overlook editorials. Editorial boards often get ideas for the subjects of their editorials from community and professional groups who meet with them to present a side of an issue. When you call to request a meeting with an editorial board, be prepared to describe the issue you want to discuss, your group's position on it, and who will attend the meeting. Prepare key points and facts in writing to leave with the board, and be prepared with a back up plan if they choose not to write on your issue. For instance, if they decline to editorialize, ask if they would print an op-ed piece written by a member of your team. But do not expect any commitments on the spot. Just think of this as an opportunity to educate these influential gatekeepers, regardless of what action they take in the near term.

> Some groups have made presence on the editorial pages a priority, with significant results. For example, in December 1997 the *Orange County Register* reported that gun control was the number one topic on its letters-to-the-editor page. This was due, in large part, to the efforts of advocates who made it their job to respond to every anti-gun control letter with their perspective and actively encouraged other advocates to do the same. They were able to keep the issue on the agenda and expand the coverage well beyond the original news event that inspired the letters in the first place.

Buy Advertising

Sometimes advocates find that the best way to have ultimate control over the content and timing of their media messages is to buy advertising space. This allows groups to target a specific message very narrowly; for instance, a group trying to pressure a few key Senators might run an "editorial"-type advertisement to appear on the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post* the day before a critical Senate vote. Often, however, the benefits of paid advertising are outweighed by the cost and limited reach of such ads, and by the fact that advertisements inherently do not convey the same external sense of legitimacy that news coverage does. However, one useful strategy used by some media advocates is to design a paid advertising campaign with the express intent of generating news coverage of the campaign. This leverages a limited amount of paid media into a much larger "earned media" splash.

For example, the Center for Tobacco-Free Kids has used paid advertising in the newspapers read by journalists and legislators to call attention to escalating political contributions by tobacco interests. Investigative reporters and others were stimulated to follow up with stories on such contributions and to mention such contributions in other tobacco stories.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges outlined in this advisory, advocates should not be daunted when trying to attract media attention. Our stories are often inherently newsworthy because they deal with important issues that have serious effects on large numbers of people. In addition, tobacco control advocates are credible, powerful sources, contrasting with the current view of the tobacco industry in a very dramatic and newsworthy way.

While it is important to plan *how* to attract reporters' attention, don't forget the second half of the equation: *what* will you say and do once you have their attention? This process, known as framing for content, is critical in influencing not just whether your story is covered, but how; it is described in detail in the next *Blowing Away the Smoke* advisory.

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Blowing Away the Smoke:
A Series of Advanced Media Advocacy Advisories
for Tobacco Control Advocates
A Project of the Advocacy Institute

FRAMING FOR CONTENT: SHAPING THE DEBATE ON TOBACCO

Advisory No. 6

Media "gatekeepers" do not merely keep watch over information, shuffling it here and there. Instead, they engage in active construction of the messages, emphasizing certain aspects of an issue and not others. This creates a situation in which the media add distinctive elements to the stream of public discourse instead of merely mirroring the priorities set out by various parties.

Gerald M. Kosicki[1]

Getting your story into the news is only half of the battle. It is critical *how* your issue is covered, not just whether it is covered. The way journalists shape news stories influences what viewers and readers think about the issue and its possible solutions. This advisory describes framing and suggests strategies to frame your stories in ways that advance public health policies.

WHAT IS FRAMING?

Frames are the boundaries around a news story that draw attention to specific parts of the news picture, relegate other elements to the background, and leave other aspects out entirely. Just as you make decisions whenever you shoot a snapshot—some conscious, some instinctive—so journalists decide what to include in a story. Framing is the selection process a journalist goes through when deciding what issues, ideas, images, and other elements should appear in the news story.

Framing can also refer to the attitude or perspective on what is included in the story. This is commonly considered the "angle" or "spin" on the story. Understanding frames in this way means paying attention to the symbols, metaphors, or visuals that evoke a particular meaning. For instance, the media have identified tobacco control advocates as "heroic Davids" challenging corrupt tobacco giants and as "busybody social engineers" determined to suppress the freedoms of adult citizens.

WHY ARE NEWS FRAMES IMPORTANT TO ADVOCATES?

The way issues are framed helps news consumers understand who is responsible for the cause and solution of a problem. How the tobacco control movement is framed and how the tobacco industry is framed will evoke very different responses from citizens who are not as engaged in the issues as we are. For example, research on media effects shows that TV news viewers typically will attribute responsibility for fixing the problem depicted to the people involved with the problem. This results because the dominant frame in TV news emphasizes isolated events or people and minimizes the larger social and physical landscape.[2]

Consider two ABC news stories broadcast on the same night in 1996. The first was a story about "crumbling schools and no money to fix them" across the nation, complete with pictures of dilapidated buildings, leaky auditoriums, and abandoned classrooms.

The story was framed in terms of institutional responsibilities to serve children in the educational system, a social accountability frame. The onus was put on the government to fix the problem.

The school story was followed by a "Person of the Week" feature about Camera Barret, "the valedictorian who had no home," a teen who, despite being homeless because of running away after a violent argument with his mother, became valedictorian of his high school class. He "had all the excuses in the world" not to excel, as the correspondent put it, yet he did excel, winning a $16,000 scholarship to Cornell. In this story, individual achievement trumps social justice concerns. There is no attention paid to ameliorating the terrible conditions that affected Camera Barret (and thousands of youths like him). The Barret story has the typical news frame—the great heart-tugging story of the triumphant individual who beats daunting odds, the "young man who proved that will conquers all."

The problem is that the second story virtually negates the first, an important story about crumbling schools. It begs the question, is it really important to fix the schools when, as Camera's story proves, even kids in the worst conditions can succeed if they have the desire and work really hard?

These two frames, institutional accountability and personal responsibility, are in constant struggle in the news. Because our individual-oriented culture is reflected in most news stories, audiences will usually identify personal responsibility as the solution unless they are presented with equally compelling information that makes them consider broader factors.

If teenagers are depicted buying cigarettes from vending machines or smoking in shopping malls, most viewers will focus on the irresponsibility of teenagers—not on the tobacco marketers. But when *60 Minutes* runs a story about former tobacco lobbyist Victor Crawford dying of throat cancer and speaking candidly about the lies and deception of the tobacco industry, people are more likely to focus on tobacco industry behavior than individual responsibility.

What Is a Public Health Frame?

Key to a public health frame is problem definition. From violence to "road rage" to tobacco, we hear that a problem has become "epidemic." The tendency is to medicalize problems (e.g., alcoholism as a disease, smoking as an addiction) to reduce stigma, and to advocate for more humane approaches to ameliorating the problem. A subsequent shift from medical problem to public health issue serves to broaden the definitions of the problem, assert a less moral and more pragmatic approach, and open the door for expanded participation by a wider range of groups.

Seeing tobacco primarily as a personal issue effectively "blames the victim" by focusing the cause of the problem and placing the responsibility for remedying it on the individual. In this view, people who use tobacco are seen as having made a bad decision and lacking backbone or willpower and so are held morally responsible. The behavior of tobacco executives and government regulators is largely excluded from consideration, since smokers are seen as exercising free choice.

Shifting the focus to a **medical frame**, where the smoker is seen as addicted, brings other elements into the frame. Now cessation programs become important to augment will power, and public education is needed to warn children of the dangers so they do not make bad choices and start smoking. Doctors are given the responsibility of trying to heal patients by providing encouragement or formal smoking cessation programs for smokers. Scientific research explores the process by which addiction takes place, how the smoking-related damage occurs, and which cessation programs are best for helping smokers quit. The moral dimension of the problem diminishes as medical research increasingly suggests that the individual may be powerless in the face of nicotine addiction.

The **public health frame** on tobacco expands this medical problem definition further. Smoking is no longer only a personal or medical issue; it is also a social and political issue. Public health analysis reveals that the decisions and policies of the corporate executives and government regulators structure the environment that shapes the individual smoker's decisions. The primary focus from a public health perspective is on the behavior of the policymaker, not the smoker. The goals become, for instance, to eliminate environmental cues such as advertising and promotion that encourage tobacco use, and to protect nonsmokers from ETS. *The function of the public health frame is to highlight governmental and corporate accountability as at least as important as personal responsibility in order to gain support for necessary policy solutions.*

How Can Advocates Frame Their News Stories From a Public Health Perspective?

The public health frame may not automatically resonate with the media the way the prevailing values of individualism and the free market do. This means that while our opposition can often get by with merely *asserting* something to be true, we must spend more effort *explaining why* our position is true. For many, the fact that more than 40 million adults continue to smoke despite clear warnings on the package suggests that smoking is an individual choice. Their logic is: smokers know the risk, they have decided to take a chance, therefore they should assume the responsibility. That logic is "natural" to many Americans who put a high value on autonomy, personal choice, and responsibility. That logic is continually reinforced by the public rhetoric of the tobacco industry.

Our challenge is to make our values and our story as vivid and compelling as the values and stories about personal choice and responsibility. For example, Americans have long held the view that shared responsibility and communal support are important values. Historians have noted how early Americans were able to forge egalitarian bonds as they formed the nation. Those values are still evident whenever communities band together to help one another other: when neighbors stay out late searching for a lost child, when volunteers provide help after natural disasters, or in the simple act of donating to charity. But the impulse toward collective responsibility is not as dominant as the theme of individuals pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps.

The following section presents several concrete techniques that advocates can use to make the public health perspective resonate in their stories.

Translate the individual problem into a social issue

In the United States individualism is a primary value. People are thought to be in control of their own destiny through the choices they make. However, we know from the history of public health that the major determinants of health are not personal choices but risks that are external to individuals. Because the community is an important context in which people live, the effort to improve health status focuses on the rules, policies, and norms that define the community environment. Translating the individual problem to a social issue helps shift our attention from the individual to the collective, from the personal to the policy, from factors that affect one person to factors that affect entire populations and communities.

To put your story in a public health frame, emphasize social problems rather than individual choices; talk about policies, not behavior. The change in language from "smoking" to "tobacco" demonstrates this

shift. "Smoking" is an act performed by an individual; "tobacco" is a product that is manufactured, marketed, and regulated. The language you use must always point to the broader environment in which people are trying to make healthy decisions. What barriers limit their options related to health? What elements of the environment could support them? Illustrating the answers to these questions would help journalists and their audiences understand the importance of addressing solutions that go beyond help for individual smokers.

Assign primary responsibility

Remember that most news consumers, unless given additional information, will assume that the person with the problem is responsible for solving it. If television shows teenagers smoking, most viewers will blame the teenagers as irresponsible. The most sympathetic portrait of a struggling mom on welfare tends to lead audiences to suggest that the solution is for her to try harder to find a job or get help from family and friends.[3] If we want audiences to understand the public health perspective on problems, we must constantly assert the corporate, governmental, or institutional responsibility for the problem. This means talking about "the tobacco companies and those the regulate them," rather than about "smokers." Name the individual or body whom you hold responsible for taking action.

Social justice is a core value in public health that can be emphasized when talking to journalists about responsibility. There is no social justice when there is a much heavier concentration of tobacco billboards in poorer communities and communities of color than in white middle- and upper-class sections of cities. Treating this as an issue of social justice rather than just a problem of the free market elevates the discussion to a higher level. Now the problem is not just personal but how we allocate hazards (tobacco billboard density being one) in our society. Those who have the least power and who are marginalized because of historical discrimination disproportionately bear the burden of hazardous exposure of all kinds.

However, merely saying that something is a social justice issue has limited persuasive power. To convey the issue of fairness, develop a story that personalizes the injustice and then provides a clear picture of who is benefiting from the condition. It becomes a story about the exploiter and the exploited. Tobacco control advocates have been very effective in creating a story that shows powerful tobacco company executives exploiting children and youths for profit.

The key to advancing the social justice and fairness issue is to create a story that leads people to say, "That just isn't right. There ought to be a law."

Present a solution

Journalists will always ask some version of two questions: What is the problem? What is the solution you propose, or what do you want to happen? The first question is fairly easy to answer. Public health research generally provides abundant data and analyses, reports, and books that describe the problem in great detail: who it happens to; its distribution in the population according to age, gender, region, race, and ethnicity; its effects and anticipated outcomes. We can speak volumes about the problem.

Where we struggle is in answering the second question. We too often offer vague statements like, "This is a very complex issue; the community really has to come together" or "Children are our future." These answers may actually be counter-productive, as you may have raised concern about the issue without giving people a specific solution to consider. This is why we recommend that you never attempt to get media coverage unless you have a specific, concrete policy solution to offer.

Ultimately, tobacco control advocates want to lessen exposure to "toxic" influences (this could include secondhand smoke, advertising, easy availability of cigarettes, etc.) and increase resistance as well (through, for example, education). To do this we need to rewrite the rules for how communities allow risks to be distributed; this is done through policy.

For instance, if asked what needs to be done about smoking by children, you should be prepared to say, for example, "We need to raise the price of cigarettes through excise taxes or penalties on cigarettes, because research shows that the best way to reduce youth consumption of a product is to raise its price." Or, "We need to enforce the new ordinance which bans billboards in the city because those messages are reaching our kids." You do not list every possible solution; you highlight the one your group has given top priority, the one that most needs to be advanced *today*. This means knowing what you want to say, and being able to say it simply. Practice with colleagues until the answers roll off your tongue.

Make a practical appeal

Because many people are entrenched in a victim-blaming perspective, they may not respond to moral appeals about how preventing tobacco-related illness is the right thing to do. The good news is that public health solutions are usually winners from a practical as well as moral perspective. Policy is important from a practical perspective because it is cost effective. It lessens or eliminates the need to continually provide remedial programs. A policy is more likely to address basic causes of the problem, such as the availability of tobacco products and regulation of where smoking takes place. You should talk about how your solution will save money, enhance productivity, save lives, or protect children (protecting vulnerable, "innocent" children is still a function of government that most people support). Give concrete examples of how your policy will benefit to the entire community—not only those who suffer from the problem.

Develop story elements

The challenge in trying to influence a story's frame is that the journalists, not you, control what is included and excluded in a story. But if you understand the business of news reporting and can anticipate journalists' needs, you can offer story elements, such as those described below, that will make the reporter's job much easier.

Compelling Visuals and Symbols. TV news in particular must have good visuals. Often, TV news workers are seeking to illustrate stories that have already been developed. For example, in a story on a local military base closing, a TV producer requested video footage of "Taps" being played as the flag came down for the last time. As it turned out, this powerful, dramatic moment was not captured on tape, and the story ran anyway; but, as the producer noted, "the pictures didn't sing." For a print story, use metaphors and symbols that make your story come alive in the readers' imaginations. A strong image exploited by tobacco control advocates was that of tobacco industry executives swearing before Congress that tobacco is not addictive.

In another example, a teenager bought a package of cigarettes from a vending machine in the basement of a House of Representatives building while wearing a T-shirt saying, "I am 14 years old." The irony of the teenager's action drew attention to the problem of tobacco availability. Tobacco control groups used the news attention to highlight Congress's failure to combat the tobacco industry and enforce its own laws to remove the vending machines. The news story was effective because it easily brought a picture to mind, first for the journalist and then for the journalist's readers.

Media Bites. Despite the complexity and depth of your issue, you *must* be prepared to make it come alive for news consumers in short "bites." At most, a source can expect to be heard for 15 seconds in a TV story, and a few sentences in a print story. When you want to be in the news, you must work within the realistic constraints of news time. Reporters usually develop their stories with interviews of sources. At the beginning, when gathering information, reporters may talk to you to get background on the issue. These discussions could provide the reporter with direct quotations for the story, but usually that will come later, after the reporter has a better understanding of the issue and knows what could best represent a particular aspect of the story. At that point, media bites become extremely important.

How do you come up with media bites? Practice with colleagues, trying out different ways to describe the problem and convey your solution. Try to speak to shared values, emphasizing themes such as fairness, common sense, or protection of children. Talk about what is at stake: Who is affected? What will this mean to people's lives? And don't be afraid to take a stand. Successful media bites often convey some irony, sometimes comparing the public health problem to another issue that people feel strongly about.

Three Examples

"Smoking a 'safer' cigarette
is like jumping out of a 10th floor window rather than a 12th floor window."

This media bite has been used by many advocates to respond to tobacco industry products such as low-nicotine cigarettes or "smokeless" cigarettes that are implied to be safer for consumers. The goal of the media bite was to illustrate the absurdity of the product and delegitimize the company in its attempt to win public favor by doing something "healthful."

"Having a no-smoking section in a restaurant
is like having a no-chlorine section in a swimming pool."

This media bite was widely used to describe the reason clean indoor air laws are necessary. The analogy illustrates clearly why "no-smoking sections" don't protect people's health.

"Smoking is a pediatric disease."

FDA Chair David Kessler made this statement in a speech in 1995. Kessler's remarks got national media attention; the headline in the New York Times was "Head of FDA Calls Smoking Pediatric Disease." The simple sentence makes more acceptable the notion of holding the tobacco industry accountable because it highlights the damage being done to children by the actions of the industry.

Social Math.[4] Numbers can help substantiate claims about the importance of public health problems. But too often advocates use huge numbers and statistics that are overwhelming and hard to comprehend. "Social math" is the practice of making large numbers interesting and compelling by placing them in a social context that provides meaning. There are several ways to do this: localize the numbers, compare them to something, and state the effects of public policy.[5] Many examples of social math combine these approaches. The best social math surprises people and gives an emotional tug; it paints a picture that helps people see what you are saying.

Examples of Social Math

In the 3 years following the introduction of the Joe Camel advertising campaign, sales of Camel cigarettes to children and teens went from $6 million per year to $476 million per year: over $1.3 million in sales a day.

This comparison illustrates the enormity of the problem of cigarette sales to minors and clearly shows the relationship between the tobacco industry's marketing strategy and the behavior of its target audience: children.

Tobacco companies spend about $5 billion a year to advertise and promote their products; that translates to about $13.7 million a day, $570,000 per hour, or over $9,500 per minute.

This example takes a huge number and makes it manageable. Even better would be to go the next step and state what $570,000 an hour might buy instead. For example, you could compare the amount the tobacco industry spends to advertise tobacco every few hours to the amount your state spends to prevent tobacco use every year.

Vice President Gore said:
"Nearly as many Americans die every day from the effects of smoking as died on that one day 85 years ago in the sinking of the Titanic."

This example compares something society is often complacent about – the large number of annual deaths from tobacco related causes – to a tragedy that caused far fewer deaths yet captured much more attention. It is an effective reminder that even though deaths from tobacco do not occur all at the same time or in such a dramatic fashion, they are still a tragedy and can be prevented.

Authentic Voices. Put journalists in touch with people who have had direct experience with tobacco-related problems such as family members who have lost a parent to tobacco use or parents whose children have been influenced to smoke by Hollywood films which depict smoking as sophisticated and glamorous. Reporters require a personal story to illustrate the topics they cover.

Fortunately, many tobacco control advocates have directly experienced the problem and have become active in the public health battle to address it. These "victims" have unique power to shape news coverage through their authentic stories. In fact, they have transformed themselves from victims to advocates.

If you arrange for such people to talk with journalists, work with them in advance so they feel prepared and comfortable. Also, they should be able to talk about the policy solution, just as any other media advocate would. Media advocates should be prepared to shift from their personal experience to the policy issue. For example, journalists will ask someone who has suffered a loss, "How do you feel about what happened?" This question would be the starting point for a statement that illuminates who shares responsibility for prevention, such as, "I feel angry that the city council will not respect my right, and my family's right, to breathe clean air. They must pass the clean air ordinance now."

Conclusion

What do we accomplish with framing? We tell a coherent and compelling story that reflects our view of the cause and solutions to public health problems. Framing points the audience to the solution we support. To frame your issue effectively, remember to:

- Know what you want to say before trying to attract media attention or talking to a journalist.
- Anticipate different ways to shift from the inevitable questions that imply the problem is one of personal responsibility to answers that highlight the institutional accountability.
- Prepare several illustrations to support your points, using compelling visuals, social math, and other good story elements.

News coverage of an issue lends it credibility and legitimacy. By planning in advance to frame your issue from the public health perspective, you can increase the likelihood not only that you will get the coverage, but also that your issue will be covered in ways that increase support for the public health policies you promote.

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