

Communicating *for Change*

5

Engaging Reporters to
Advance Health Policy



Communicating for Change | Module 5: Engaging Reporters to Advance Health Policy

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Center for Healthy Communities

Foreword

The California Endowment recognizes that no single policy or systems change will achieve our goals. Rather, we believe that many policy, system and organizational changes are necessary at the local, state and national levels to achieve these goals. We also believe that everyone has a role to play and that all organizations can contribute to a change process.

In order to help build the capacity of our partners to elevate our collective goals and put forth solutions, The Endowment's Communications and Public Affairs Department and the Center for Healthy Communities have developed *Communicating for Change* as part of the Center's Health ExChange Academy. The *Communicating for Change* series is designed to provide advocates with the resources they need to effectively use media advocacy and other strategic communications tools to ensure that their policy goals for improving the health of California's underserved communities remain in the spotlight.

Special thanks are due to the team at Berkeley Media Studies Group and all the other partners who participated in the design of this curriculum, which we hope will help you amplify your voices for change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert K. Ross', with a stylized, flowing script.

Robert K. Ross, M.D.
President and Chief Executive Officer
The California Endowment

Curriculum Introduction

The California Endowment's *Communicating for Change* training series will help advocates learn to engage the news media strategically. Whether the goal is increasing state funding for physical education programs or requiring hospitals to provide language access services, advocates can harness the power of the news media to amplify their voices, reach policymakers, and advance their policy goals.

This seven-session training series, which combines advocacy case studies with hands-on activities and group worksheets, will help advocates develop the skills to engage the news media effectively. The goal is to learn how media advocacy strategies can best support policy-change efforts to create healthier communities.

This manual is for participants of the fifth training session of the *Communicating for Change* curriculum, Module 5: *Engaging Reporters to Advance Health Policy*. The topics for the other six training sessions are listed on the next page. We hope you enjoy this training and that it helps you reach your goals of creating healthier communities across California.

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

Module 1: *Making the Case for Health with Media Advocacy*

Module 1 introduces how to use media advocacy strategically to advance policy. Participants will learn to recognize the news media's role in shaping debates on community health. They will clarify their overall strategy and learn how it relates to a media strategy, a message strategy, and a media access strategy. This will be the basis for subsequent trainings.

Module 2: *Planning Ahead for Strategic Media Advocacy*

Module 2 takes participants through each step of developing a media advocacy plan: setting goals and objectives, identifying strategies and tactics, assessing resources, determining timelines and specifying who will do what. Participants will learn to integrate communications planning organizationally and plan for timely, proactive news coverage.

Module 3: *Shaping Public Debate with Framing and Messages*

Module 3 explains framing—what it is and why it matters—and helps participants apply that knowledge to developing messages in advocacy campaigns. Participants will practice framing a range of community health issues to support policy change.

Module 4: *Creating News that Reaches Decision Makers*

Module 4 explores different news story elements so participants can get access to journalists by emphasizing what is newsworthy about their issue. Participants will explore how to create news, piggyback on breaking news, meet with editorial boards, submit op-eds and letters to the editor, and develop advocacy ads.

Module 5: *Engaging Reporters to Advance Health Policy*

Module 5 gives participants intensive practice being spokespeople for their issue, including on-camera training. Participants will learn to anticipate and practice answering the tough questions reporters ask.

Module 6: *Targeting Audiences with New Communication Tools*

Module 6 gives participants a tour of new communications tools, including blogs, e-flicks, and viral marketing so they can tailor their advocacy communications to specific goals and audiences.

Module 7: *Training Allies in Strategic Media Advocacy*

In Module 7 those who want to train others in their organizations learn interactive techniques for teaching media advocacy.

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Introduction

1

Almost everyone gets nervous thinking about media interviews. The good news is that there is a lot you can do to prepare ahead of time, so you won't have to rely on just what occurs to you in the moment. If you've heard someone eloquently answer a reporter's question, chances are they planned and practiced that answer in advance. This module can help you identify potential spokespeople and help each of you learn to make a strong case for your policy goals *before* reporters ask their questions.

The starting point for any media advocacy endeavor, including speaking with reporters, is deciding on your overall strategy. Choose the problem you want to address, the policy solution you want to see and the person or group who can make that change happen. Making these decisions will put you well on the way to answering any reporter question.

As Modules 1–4 discuss, once your group has made the “Layers of Strategy” decisions (see page 2) you will be able to evaluate whether participating in a particular interview could advance your media strategy and what messages will best communicate your goals to your target audience. Then, if you agree to an interview, you'll have a clear idea of your own reasons for saying yes and know what direction you'd like the interview to go.

The tips in this module will help you and your allies prepare for many types of media interviews. Then, it's up to you to practice making your case, before you're on the record. Speaking clearly, strategically and with conviction in media interviews can help policymakers understand the importance of supporting your solutions.

*“Speak your mind, even
if your voice shakes.”*

- Maggie Kuhn, Gray Panthers

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR MODULE 5

By the end of Module 5 participants will:

- **Identify the types of spokespeople who can advance their advocacy goals;**
- **Anticipate the types of questions reporters are likely to ask;**

- Have practiced answering reporters' typical questions;
- Be able to link their experiences to the case for policy change;
- Know what materials they need to have on hand before their next interview; and
- Have developed relationships with other California advocates.

MEDIA ADVOCACY LAYERS OF STRATEGY

OVERALL STRATEGY



- Define the problem you want to address.
- Clarify the policy solution for which you will advocate.
- Identify the target with the power to make that change.
- Name the allies who can help make your case.
- List the advocacy actions you will take to influence the target.

MEDIA STRATEGY



- Identify the best methods to communicate with your target.
- Decide whether or not engaging the media will advance your overall strategy.
- Find the media outlets that will best reach your target audiences.
- Compile the media tactics you will employ.

MESSAGE STRATEGY



- Frame the issue to reflect your values and support the policy goal.
- Create a message that describes the problem, the solution and why it matters.
- Develop a plan to assess and improve the effectiveness of your message.
- Decide who will convey your message.
- Identify the materials you will need to make your case.

MEDIA ACCESS STRATEGY



- Determine when media attention could affect the policy process.
- Figure out how you will gain access to the media.
- Prepare newsworthy story elements to offer reporters.
- Establish a plan for capturing and reusing coverage.

Selecting Authentic Voices

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Authentic voices are spokespeople who can provide a unique perspective on the problem and the need for the policy solution based on their personal or professional experience. They might have suffered from the health problem directly or have other relevant experience as members of the affected community, health care providers, civic leaders, policy advocates, elected officials, researchers, business people, school officials, etc. Consider carefully which allies could make your case effectively because, as the saying goes, “the messenger is the message.” News professionals and policymakers respond to who is speaking, not just to what they say. Think about who will have credibility explaining to your target audience the causes of the problem, who is affected and why the policy solution makes sense. Take a moment to brainstorm possible authentic voices for your campaign by considering:

→ **Who supports your advocacy goals?**

Include current allies and those you hope to cultivate. Also list those who may not be in a position to go “on the record” but could provide reporters with background information such as public health data.

→ **What unique perspective can they offer?**

Keeping track of who can explain different parts of the issue can help you see gaps you’ll need to fill to make your case effectively with reporters and policymakers.

→ **Who will your target audience respond to?**

Preparing a range of allies to make your case will allow you to put forward the spokesperson who can be most effective in reaching your target audience at a particular moment in time. A legislator may want to hear from their constituents first, for example, and then from an expert on the financial impact of your solution. Reporters will also want to interview a range of spokespeople to help them create a compelling story.

Consider carefully which allies could make your case effectively because, as the saying goes, “the messenger is the message.”

Knowing whose opinion your target audience values and what questions a reporter is likely to ask will help you know who you need to have ready to make your case. Imagine, for example, your advocacy coalition is trying to convince the governor to support legislation that will require health plans to provide interpreter services. You want to demonstrate that having a trained, medical interpreter for patients with limited English proficiency is critical to ensuring that quality care is provided. Who should speak at your press conference? Let's take a look at some possible options:

Patients who do not speak English well could describe (either through an interpreter or to in-language media) the frustration, dangers and injustice of going to the emergency room in pain and not being able to communicate with hospital staff. Other patients could describe how their medical care, and health, improved when health-plan policies ensured that interpreter services were available at each medical visit. Individual stories are compelling, and show that the problem is real, serious and deserves attention. To be effective in an advocacy campaign, individuals can practice linking their personal experience to the need for policy change and to the values that will motivate action.

A doctor who has patients with limited English proficiency could describe the difficulties language barriers cause in understanding a patient's symptoms, making a correct diagnosis, and communicating a treatment plan. They can underscore the value of interpreters in improving health care and explain why it is inappropriate to expect children or family members to fill this role. They can discuss the issue in terms of fairness, since certain patients will receive worse care because the health system is not set up to serve them. Doctors are seen as authorities in health policy debates, since they can draw on their direct experience with patients, medicine and the health care system.

A researcher who studied the problem could present data demonstrating that when non-English speaking patients are unable to communicate with their doctor, they receive poorer health care compared to English-speaking patients. The researcher could highlight that language barriers are a systemic problem, not just the experience of one individual, which creates unjust and unnecessary health disparities. Researchers can provide objective, carefully gathered information that explains the causes and seriousness of the problem.

Hospital and health plan representatives could describe how they successfully implemented an interpreter policy similar to that required by the pending legislation. They could describe the benefits they have seen

such as improved patient care, reduced stress in hospital intake staff, and the cost savings experienced when each patient's condition is correctly identified earlier. A speaker from the health care industry can be a valuable political ally, since this is a powerful interest group.

A policy expert or policymaker could explain the urgency of solving this problem with legislation and the practical details of implementing the proposal. Having policymakers as authentic voices emphasizes that there are solutions available, increases the visibility of the issue, and provides an effective way to reach other elected officials.

This isn't an exhaustive list. Your coalition may include a broad range of advocates who can make your case. The key is to think carefully about who can be the most effective voice for your campaign with each target audience and in each news story. As we discussed in Module 3 on framing, given the tendency to hold individuals solely responsible for their health problems, it is crucial to have allies who can explain the larger societal factors that contribute to or damage health. Having a range of allies speaking up for your collective goals also demonstrates the political strength of your effort and makes for a more interesting news story.

Once you know who will make your case, make sure reporters can find them. Your press materials can include a list of contacts and a short description of what each person can discuss, based on their personal and professional experience. Another way to publicize your spokespeople is to create an online database of experts. The SheSource project (see sidebar) describes a national effort to cultivate a range of authentic voices on a variety of issues to increase the number of spokeswomen featured in print and broadcast media.



The Case of the Missing Women Experts

In 2005, three organizations formed a partnership to address the absence of women's voices in the news media. The Women's Funding Network, the White House Project and Fenton Communications created an initiative to encourage a more "representative discourse" on a variety of topics by promoting spokeswomen from diverse backgrounds to the news media. The result was SheSource.org, a self-described "brain trust" of women experts on a variety of subjects, ranging from the economy to the military to humanitarian issues. The online database serves to connect these experts with journalists, producers and talk show bookers who need the opinions of female sources and guests for lively debate and discussion of current events and issues.

Bridging the Gender Gap

SheSource.org seeks to bridge the gender gap in news coverage by making it easy for journalists to connect with women experts on a variety of topics. Journalists can search the organization's database for women by keyword, issue, name or region. The search results in a list of spokeswomen who fit the search criteria, along with a link to their biographies and photos or videos. Since October 2005, the database has doubled in size and now connects journalists from news outlets including CNN, *The New York Times*, Bloomberg, and NBC with over 300 highly qualified female guests and sources.

The bottom line: It's not enough to be a quotable expert on an issue. Women and other underrepresented voices have to place themselves in reporters' line of vision in order to be seen—and therefore, heard—by policymakers and the public.

Before giving contact names to a reporter, you should make sure each person is prepared to make the case for policy change confidently and effectively. This means both developing media materials and building their interview skills.

One example of the power of preparing authentic voices to speak publicly comes from a campaign to improve working conditions for hotel workers. With media training and a strategic communications plan the hotel workers made national news, explained the widespread dangers of housekeeping at luxury hotels, and won safety protections in their next union contract.



Training Advocates as Authentic Voices: Helping Hotel Workers Tell Their Story

In 2006, UNITE-HERE, the textile and hotel workers union, decided to invest in communications training for its member-leaders in the hotel industry so they could learn to speak publicly and powerfully about the unhealthy working conditions at hotel chains like Hilton, Westin, Marriott and Crowne Plaza.

A major problem for the workers was that the demand for plusher accommodations (super-thick mattresses, multiple types of pillows and extra-

large duvets), combined with fewer staff and intensified pressures to turn over rooms quickly, were taking a drastic toll on the bodies of housekeepers. Incidents of disabling back pain and muscular damage caused by repetitive stress had skyrocketed in just five years. Westin's "Heavenly Bed" didn't look so wonderful to hotel workers who had to make up hundreds of them a week.

With many hotel contracts up for re-negotiation the next year, UNITE-HERE and the workers themselves knew it was time to speak out publicly about the unhealthy conditions. They wanted to ensure new protections in their next contract and felt that the media spotlight could encourage hotel executives to do the right thing.

So how does injury in the service of luxury become news?

Step 1: Building trust. The SPIN Project media trainers began collaborating with member-leaders in different states to agree on a grassroots approach to message training. Rather than perfect-





ing talking points crafted by national union staff, the staff and trainers agreed that local voices and authentic personal stories would become the heart of the national campaign.

Step 2: Conducting training sessions. From Toronto to Honolulu with stops in several major cities, the training team provided spokesperson training to more than 200 of the union’s member-leaders, the vast majority of whom are immigrant women and women of color.

Step 3: Message development. “A little bit of encouragement went a long way,” recalled one trainer, who conducted workshops in English and Spanish. During the training sessions, members started to speak up with confidence. They had plenty to say about how their lives have been affected by neck and back injuries caused by quick, forced lifting movements undertaken thousands of times per shift. The training team helped the women see that telling their stories amounted to both a personal and collective political claim on the human right to safety and dignity. Although the

Photograph courtesy of UNITE-HERE

women had become used to the pain, they should not be expected to sacrifice their health in the service of luxury. Through the sessions, the women learned to tell their personal stories in a way that supported the collective advocacy goal—winning new protections in their union contracts.

Step 4: Media strategy. Building the skills of individual women to tell their stories was the cornerstone of the UNITE-HERE media strategy. Advocates also worked to create an online database on the “Hotel Workers Rising” Web site, so that reporters could quickly and easily read bios of hotel workers available for interviews. Another key piece of the media strategy involved publicizing an impressive report, *Creating Luxury, Enduring Pain: How Hotel Work Is Hurting Housekeepers*. The report supported the personal stories told by workers with data from scholars and government agencies on the causes and rates of injuries among many of the nation’s 350,000 hotel housekeepers.

Over the course of the campaign, the union officials and individual member-leaders talked to numerous reporters and were featured in news stories in prominent outlets such as *The New York Times*. The clear, organized spokesperson strategy and advocacy campaign paid off—workers told their stories, turned up the heat on hotel executives, won new protections in contracts and created better working conditions for many in the industry.



3

Developing Interview Materials

In addition to a core message, authentic voices should be prepared with a range of materials to help make their case.

As we discussed in Modules 1 and 3, the first step in developing your media materials is to decide on your overall strategy and how you want to frame your issue. Those decisions are the basis for developing your core message. We recommend reading over the framing module before developing your core message, but as a quick review it should address the three questions below (not necessarily in this order):

→ **What is the problem?**

Answer: Your perspective on what has gone wrong

→ **Why does it matter?**

Answer: Your core values

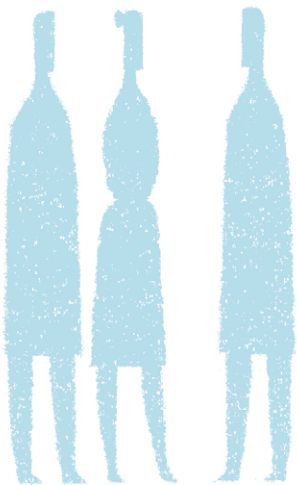
→ **What is the solution?**

Answer: Who should take what policy action, by when

This core message can be tailored to answer most questions a reporter will ask. Not every authentic voice has to present the message in exactly the same words, but they have to mean the same thing. Their statements should reflect a shared understanding of what causes the problem, what policy change will solve it and why it matters. Since authentic voices are speaking from their own personal or professional perspective, they may have different reasons for supporting the policy or different stories to tell on why it is needed. They can still articulate their perspective in a way that supports the overall advocacy strategy.

In addition to a core message, authentic voices should be prepared with a range of materials to help make their case. These are described in Module 4 on access strategy and include:

- **Interesting stories** that illustrate core values and the need for a policy solution
- **Media bites** that provide newsworthy quotes
- **Social math** that communicates data in accessible ways
- **Newsworthy visuals** that show both the seriousness of the problem and a hopeful vision of what the community could look like if the policy solution was adopted
- **A tip sheet** with answers to frequently asked and hard questions



MAKE SMOOTH TRANSITIONS FROM THE WRONG QUESTION TO THE RIGHT ANSWER

Pivot phrases allow you to steer away from a difficult or tangential question and make your key points. Professional spokespeople, including those who speak for corporations, are very good at moving interviews in the direction they prefer. Consider these examples, which come from a memo from the multinational tobacco company Philip Morris. These phrases were recommended by tobacco industry strategists to help corporate executives control the direction of media interviews. Any of these phrases could be used by advocates seeking to refocus attention back to their own key points.

HELPFUL TRANSITIONAL PHRASES

That's an interesting question; let me remind you, though...

Before I forget, I think the audience would want to know that...

Let me put that in perspective...

What's really important to remember, however...

Before we get off that subject/topic, let me add...

That's not my area of expertise, but what I can tell you is...

That's a good point, but I think your audience/readers would be interested in knowing that...

Other typical questions you might hear and should prepare to answer are:

- ***How big is this problem and whom does it affect?***
- ***What will happen if nothing is done?***
- ***Is the solution feasible, fair, affordable?***
- ***Shouldn't individuals just take more responsibility for their own health?***
- ***Who opposes this change and what will they say?***
- ***Can you give me an individual with the problem to interview?***

Preparing for Interviews

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Following a few interview guidelines can help you stick to your key points. In this section we offer general interview tips and specific tips for print, radio and television interviews. We also suggest ways to prepare for interviews under three scenarios: talking to the media in proactive, reactive and crisis situations. The best preparation for interviews, of course, is to be clear on your overall strategy and your framing/message strategy. As we mentioned in Modules 1–4, those decisions will be the basis for any answer you give a reporter.

The best preparation for interviews is to be clear on your overall strategy and your framing/message strategy.

INTERVIEW TIPS

Know your goals.

Being clear how the interview can advance your overall advocacy strategy will help you decide what to focus on. What policymaker and potential allies are you trying to reach? What do they need to understand to support your policy solution?

Stay on message.

Don't treat an interview like a conversation. It's easy to fall into a responsive mode when a reporter is asking questions. Step back and assess where the interview is going. Don't wait for the reporter to ask "the right" questions; take every question as an opportunity to steer the interview towards your key points and core message. Talk more about the policy solution than the problem.

Speak to shared values.

Help policymakers understand why solving this problem matters. What is at stake? Emphasize that solving community health problems is a shared responsibility, not just a personal responsibility. Don't be afraid to be passionate. You are committed to your cause for important reasons.

Resist the urge to say everything.

You can't be comprehensive and strategic at the same time. Everything you say is on the record, so don't let your key points get lost by talking too much. Prepare media bites that get your points across quickly and vividly (See Module 4 for sample media bites). Resist the temptation to fill the gap; wait patiently for the reporter to ask another question.

Speak slowly for an accurate quote.

Since you usually aren't being recorded during a newspaper interview, speak slowly so reporters have time to capture what you say accurately, or repeat your comment, rephrasing it only slightly.

Package statistics for print.

Support what you say in the interview with research packaged in visually interesting graphics. Reporters on deadline don't have time to do statistical research. They rely on authoritative reports by respected sources.

Keep lead times in mind.

Daily newspapers develop stories quickly, much like broadcast news, though longer pieces for the Sunday edition may be in the works for a week or more. Weekly magazines develop some pieces over a month and monthly publications often have a two-month lead time from research to publication. When reporters call you for an interview, the time you have to work with them will vary given the filing deadline.

BROADCAST MEDIA TIPS

Broadcast media offer the opportunity to reach large numbers of people at once. The combined audience for radio and TV programs dwarfs the circulation of most print media. Because broadcast media reach so many people, opinion leaders are always interested in how stories play out on the airwaves. Stories for TV or radio news, however, are generally much shorter than stories in newspapers or magazines. You may have less than a minute to deliver your message. Since television and radio interviews can be on-air discussions with the host, find out as much as possible in advance about any interview opportunity that arises. For broadcast interviews you'll want to know:

- *What is the host's position on your issue?*
- *What is the host's style? If the host strives to create controversy, are you prepared to thrive in that environment?*
- *Will there be other guests? If so, what position will they take?*
- *Do the show's producers have telephone call-ins? Is it aired at a time when you can get a few friends or colleagues to call in with supportive questions?*



TELEVISION TIPS

Practicing for interviews on camera can help you look and feel confident delivering your message with many people watching. Ask a colleague to film you being interviewed and then offer you feedback. Consider the tips below to improve your effectiveness:

Think visually.

Television relies on good pictures. Make sure you offer producers something to show while your spokesperson speaks. If the camera crews are coming to you, set up an interesting backdrop that supports your case or identifies your organization. (See Module 4 for more on creating effective visuals.)

Be confident, composed and clear.

Speak in complete thoughts. A producer will be looking for a clean, complete quote they can use to illustrate the story. Be mindful of your body language; make sure you sit up straight and don't move around too much.

Speak more slowly than normal.

Often people speak quickly when they are nervous, so try to relax and speak in an approachable, interesting way.

Focus on the reporter.

Keep your eyes on the person you are talking to. Avoid looking directly at the camera, crew or audience.

Look like a pro.

Dress in a way that will show up well on camera. Pay attention to what you think works when you watch the news. Many people wear solid-color clothing that isn't black or white. Big jewelry tends to distract and buttons with slogans are hard to read. Use make-up if necessary—most people do on camera.

RADIO TIPS

Radio interviews can be done live in a studio or over the phone. If possible, go in to the station so that your voice sounds as strong and clear as possible. Either way, remember that the listening audience can't see you or the gestures or pictures you normally use to illustrate your points.

Bring vivid images to mind.

Tell vivid stories that paint a picture for listeners. Describe what the problem looks like and how the affected community would look different with your solution in place. Suggest ways reporters could capture sounds to illustrate your issue. If you are talking about asthma, for example, perhaps the sounds of trucks on a highway would underscore your quote about diesel pollution as the source of increased respiratory problems.

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Minimize distractions.

Do your phone interviews from a quiet office. Disable call waiting and silence other devices that will make noise (including cell phones).

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Use a landline.

If participating by phone, do the interview on a landline rather than a cordless phone, speakerphone or cell phone. You want your points to be heard clearly.

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Avoid audio feedback.

Don't listen to the radio while you are being interviewed—the sound of your own voice will distract you and the audio feedback will distract the audience and the interviewer.

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Organize supporters to call in during your interview.

Know what questions they will ask or supportive statements they will make.

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In addition to being interviewed by different types of news media, you can be interviewed under different circumstances. You can construct a strategy for most media interviews by anticipating proactive, reactive and crisis media scenarios.

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PREPARE FOR PROACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

As we discussed in Module 4 on access strategy, advocates can proactively “pitch” news stories directly to journalists. Since reporters and producers get many inquiries, you’ll have to be very persuasive and at the same time brief. Your advance research and preparation will help you frame a newsworthy story.

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Sometimes advocates are timid when they talk to reporters, gently asking for coverage as if the reporter is doing them a favor by listening or showing up. Avoid that attitude. Remember that reporters rely on sources

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for good stories. Your experience and connections give you insights into pressing community health issues that reporters may not know about. The tips below, and the section on creating news in Module 4, can help you prepare for successful pitches:

Pitch to reporters you know.

By getting to know reporters and their interests before you have something to pitch, you will increase the chances that they will take your call and cover your story. By knowing a reporter’s work—particularly if they cover a specific “beat” or topic—you can link your story to something they have already covered or cover on a regular basis.

Provide a compelling story.

Don’t approach a reporter to talk about an “issue.” Instead, help them create a story. Let them know what drama they can describe, authentic voices they can quote, and visuals they can show.

Emphasize newsworthiness.

Reporters will want to know what makes this story newsworthy now. Emphasize elements such as timeliness, conflict, controversy, broad interest, breakthroughs, local pegs and/or milestones. (See Module 4 for more on determining what is newsworthy.) Don’t flood reporters with pitches; wait until you have something newsworthy.

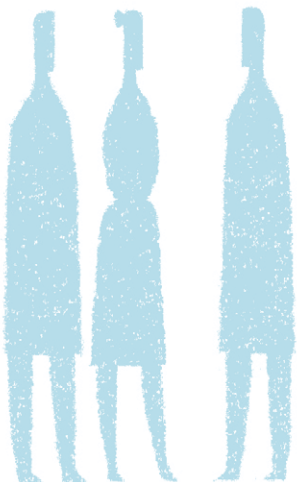
Be respectful.

Always start by asking if it is a good time to talk. If the reporter is on a deadline, arrange a better time. Learn how each reporter prefers to be contacted—by phone or email. If you get a reporter on the phone, be ready to make your case quickly, right then and there.

PREPARE FOR REACTIVE MEDIA RELATIONS

Many advocates tell us they have primarily a reactive media strategy—they talk when reporters call them. That’s why it is so important to have strategic messages and strong media skills developed, even when you don’t plan to seek media coverage. With your strategic media goals in mind, you can decide whether to say yes to the interview. If you decide to participate, you will know what you hope to achieve. Then you can start the interview by asking the reporter a few questions such as:

- *What’s your story?*
- *Who else have you talked to?*



- *What do you need?*

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- *What's your deadline?*

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These simple questions can help you learn how far along a reporter is in developing the story and what they already know about the issue. Perhaps you are the first person they called and they are writing a feature piece with a deadline next month. That gives you an opportunity to help shape the reporter's understanding and framing of the issue by suggesting new angles and additional people to interview. Or the reporter could be looking for one final fact before they file their piece or want you to respond to an opponent's claim. You can decide whether you can help them, but any information you learn in asking these questions can help you be more strategic. The interview may have started out with you in a reactive position, but you can be proactive in steering the direction.

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PREPARE TO RESPOND IN A CRISIS

Reporters may call you to respond to a breaking story about bad news. Crisis stories come in many forms, from an unexpected tragedy to a political scandal.

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No one wants to get those calls. In news stories about a crisis, you may not be able, or want to, shift the frame to your policy goals but you may be able to make the story more accurate and put it in a broader context.

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Advocates tell us that when bad news breaks, they feel pressure to defend their entire field. However, sometimes bad news is important news. If administrators have been skimming monies that were supposed to support health care programs for poor children, then the public needs to know about it. The spotlight can help end mismanagement and get the resources back where they were intended to go. This example illustrates why we avoid the terms "bad news" and "good news." Even difficult stories can be reported well and result in improvements in the programs and communities we care about.

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It is frustrating, however, if the news is inaccurate and puts the field or community in a bad light. If a difficult story in the news is not representative or accurate, say so. Cite examples from your own experience and don't be afraid to ask publicly for answers and action in a problematic case. If someone has made a mistake, say so. If the problem is systemic, describe policies that could improve the situation and name the policymakers you hold responsible for taking action. Your first objective is to do what is best for community health, not to make the difficult news disappear.

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Building Interview Skills

With practice, you can develop the discipline you need so all your answers, no matter what the question, lead to your policy solution.

Now that you know what you want to say and the general tips for how to interview effectively, you can improve your skills by practicing. Ask a colleague to do a mock interview with you, making sure they ask both the common and the hard questions. Remember, the reporter always controls the questions, but you control the answers. Your responses not only affect what you are quoted as saying but also may influence what question the reporter asks next. With practice, you can develop the discipline you need so all your answers, no matter what the question, lead to your policy solution.

Staying on message can be challenging. It is easy to be distracted by a reporter's questions. And reporters frequently ask questions that make it easy to talk about the health problems of individual people rather than policy solutions. Your goal is to use the reporter's questions as a launching point to frame the issue from your perspective and communicate your core message. Remember, an interview is not a conversation, but a series of opportunities to make the case for your policy solution. In a conversation, you can casually answer questions, but in an interview, your answers should either state your policy goal directly, or at least lead the reporter to ask you more about it.

Below are two examples that show how to answer interview questions strategically. In the first example we illustrate how your responses can affect the direction of an interview, encouraging a reporter to focus on policy solutions rather than individual responsibility for a problem. In the second example, we show how you can answer a single question in a variety of ways, each answer highlighting a different policy solution.

EXAMPLE #1: STAYING ON TRACK IN INTERVIEWS

Let's assume, for example, that you are concerned with the skyrocketing rates of childhood diabetes and that your goal is to eliminate the marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to children in public schools. You want to get media attention to increase the pressure on school board members and city officials to support your policy to limit junk food marketing in schools. When a reporter calls, you are excited about the opportunity to present your case.

YOUR INTERVIEW GOES SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

Reporter: Why are you concerned about childhood diabetes?

You: Childhood diabetes is a serious problem that's rapidly getting worse. Children are getting diabetes at higher rates than ever before. As if that weren't bad enough, it puts them at risk for other problems later in life, including heart disease and stroke.

Reporter: Doesn't the problem start at home with poor eating habits? Why are parents letting their children get so fat?

You: Parents are doing their best to encourage healthy eating and activity with their kids. But when kids go to school, they face a daily onslaught of junk food marketing that encourages making poor food choices. Parents should be able to depend on schools to provide an environment that encourages learning and health.

So far, so good! You were handed a question about parental responsibility, but redirected the answer in order to put the responsibility on schools. Let's see how the interview progresses.

Reporter: How much does junk food marketing influence the choices kids make?

You: The fast food industry wouldn't spend \$1 million an hour, every hour, on marketing to children if it didn't increase sales of their products. Children watching Saturday morning TV see an average of one food ad every five minutes. Most of the foods advertised are unhealthy. The industry has become the primary nutrition educators of our children and the lessons aren't good.

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Policy goal: Make health insurance transferable from job to job.

Answer: Lung cancer rates among women are on the rise. That is a serious problem for people who have to change jobs. If their insurance is not transferable, they lose health benefits and services for a life-threatening pre-existing condition. We really need a seamless health care system that covers people consistently, no matter where they work.

As you can see with these examples, there are many ways to answer the same question from a reporter. In mock interviews with your colleagues practice answering hard questions: use pivot phrases to get to your core message and give different answers to the same question to gain experience in controlling an interview. Then, you will have the confidence and skills to effectively make your case for policy change out loud and on camera.



Conclusion

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Media advocacy is a powerful tool for social change. Selecting and training authentic voices that will get the attention of key policymakers is an important part of your groundwork. Everyone who speaks on behalf of your campaign should understand the overall advocacy strategy and be prepared to define the problem, the solution, who is responsible and why it matters. Practicing for interviews can help calm your nerves, hone your messages, and increase the chances that news coverage accurately frames the issue from your perspective. Cultivating authentic voices and developing interview skills takes substantial effort, so you'll want to invest in this step over time. Once you have trained a diverse group, advance your advocacy work by encouraging each other to speak out in a variety of settings, such as public hearings, news events, fundraising meetings and community events. Together, with practice, we can raise our voices, speak our minds, and insist on solutions that build healthy communities for everyone.

*Together, with practice,
we can raise our voices,
speak our minds, and
insist on healthy com-
munities for everyone.*

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Resources

Sources Cited

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Organizations

Berkeley Media Studies Group

www.bmsg.org

Communications Consortium Media Center

www.ccmc.org/main.htm

Fenton Communications

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FrameWorks Institute

www.frameworksinstitute.org

Green Media Toolshed

www.greenmediatoolshed.org

Media Alliance

www.media-alliance.org

The Opportunity Agenda

www.opportunityagenda.org

The Praxis Project

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Public Media Center

www.publicmediacenter.org

The Spin Project

www.spinproject.org

Youth Media Council

www.youthmediacouncil.org

Worksheets

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1. Strategic Media Advocacy Planning Questions

We recommend planning your media advocacy efforts by discussing four layers of strategy: overall strategy, media strategy, message strategy and media access strategy. This curriculum has one training module devoted to each layer of strategy. Discussing the key questions for each layer in order will give you a clear sense of your larger goals before you attract news attention. As your advocacy campaign changes course, you can revisit each layer of strategy.



OVERALL STRATEGY

What is the problem?

What is the solution?

Who has the power to make that change?

What is the target's position on your policy goal?

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What allies must be mobilized to apply the necessary pressure?

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Who opposes the policy and what will they say or do?

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What advocacy actions will you take to reach or influence your target?

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1. Strategic Media Advocacy Planning Questions *cont.*



MEDIA STRATEGY

What is best way to reach your target(s) at each stage of the campaign?

If it is through the media, which outlets would reach your target audience?

When would media attention make a difference in the policy making process?

Who will be involved in developing your media advocacy strategies?

What communications protocol do you have in place?

How will you build your organizational communications capacity?

How will you evaluate your media efforts and decide when to change course?

How will you capture news clippings and track coverage?

Who will you send the news clips to (journalists, allies, targets, financial contributors) and what will you say?

How will you follow up with your target(s) after media coverage?

1. Strategic Media Advocacy Planning Questions *cont.*



MESSAGE STRATEGY

Is your issue or policy goal in the news at all now?

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If yes, how is it framed?

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Who is portrayed as responsible for the problem?

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Who is portrayed as responsible for the solution?

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What is left out of current coverage?

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Who or what types of people are quoted often?

Who could make the case for the policy solution?

What values support your perspective and policy solution?

What is the most important message that would help convince your target to act? (What is the problem? What is the policy solution? Why does it matter?)

What will you need to make your case (data, visuals, social math, policy research)?

What will your opposition say? How will you respond to those arguments?

1. Strategic Media Advocacy Planning Questions *cont.*



MEDIA ACCESS STRATEGY

What aspects of your story are interesting, unusual or otherwise newsworthy?

When might be a good time of year to attract attention to this story?

What can you do to get your story in the media?

- Create news (release a report, hold an event)
- Piggyback on a breaking story
- Use editorial strategies (op-eds, editorial board visits, letters to the editor)
- Purchase paid ads

What story elements (social math, visuals, authentic voices) can support your frame and package the story for journalists?

Dotted lines for writing.

What will you say when you call to pitch the story to reporters?

Dotted lines for writing.

How will you develop and nurture ongoing relationships with reporters? What authentic voices, information, perspectives or contacts can you offer them?

Dotted lines for writing.

2. Message Development Questions

What is the problem? (Who is affected and how)

Why does it matter? (Values)

What should be done? (Policy solution and target)

Combine the ideas above into 2–3 sentences that summarize your core message.

One story that illustrates this perspective and the need for our policy solution is:

3. Brainstorming Authentic Voices

You'll want to recruit many speakers that can help tell your story. Try to include a range of people affected by a problem and professionals with varied expertise. Diversity will underscore the breadth of your story and its wide appeal. Authentic voices offering different perspectives might include the following:

THIS AUTHENTIC VOICE...	COULD DESCRIBE THIS ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM OR SOLUTION...
Community members affected by the problem	
Policy expert	
Government official	
Academic researcher	

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3. Brainstorming Authentic Voices *cont.*

THIS AUTHENTIC VOICE...	COULD DESCRIBE THIS ASPECT OF THE PROBLEM OR SOLUTION...
Public interest advocate	
Industry representative	
Health care worker	
Other	
Other	

4. Anticipating and Answering Hard Questions

Once you have developed your core message, you will want to practice using it in your answers to hard questions. Take the time now to brainstorm what questions you will likely be asked, given how the issue is currently framed; the arguments your opposition will make; and the policy scenario at hand. Decide the best responses with your colleagues, circulate those as talking points, and then practice delivering them in mock interviews together.

Hard question:

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Our response:

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Hard question:

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Our response:

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4. Anticipating and Answering Hard Questions *cont.*

Hard question:

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Our response:

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Hard question:

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Our response:

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