

THE POLICY PROCESS: STEP 6

INITIATE MEDIA ADVOCACY

The goal of Policy Step 6 is to create a media advocacy plan to inform key decision makers, target audiences, and the public about the proposed policy you are working on in order to stimulate a broad base of support.

Media advocacy is a powerful tool to advance the tobacco-free campus policy, using specific tactics to influence both decision makers and other campus and community members to build support for the policy.

Coalitions too often use media to publicize their events or to just inform the public about a particular tobacco problem. Community education is an important element of all policy work, but it is only a piece of a larger strategy focused on using media as an agent of change. We use media advocacy to spotlight our issue and propose appropriate solutions, always including an “ask” for action.

Although a media advocacy campaign has numerous elements, it includes the following central components:

- Setting the agenda/getting media attention
- Framing or shaping the debate
- Advancing specific solutions or policies

Achieving the above requires a media advocacy plan, which has the following elements:

1. Define media campaign goals and objectives
2. Identify your target audience
3. Develop your message
4. Develop story ideas
5. Define action steps

Each of these elements is important and is briefly described below. For further information, refer to Appendix 15 for a Media Advocacy Primer that can assist you in thinking through the design of your media advocacy campaign (Alcohol Justice, 2007). For a detailed guide on how to use media advocacy to influence policy, see Dorfman (2007). The Community Toolbox from Kentucky University has excellent resources to assist in preparing press releases.



WHAT IS MEDIA ADVOCACY?

Media advocacy is the process of disseminating policy-related information through the communications media, especially where the aim is to effect action, a change of policy or to alter the public’s view of an issue (Alcohol Justice, 2007).

1. **Define media campaign goals and objectives** — The overarching goal of your campaign is the adoption of a tobacco-free campus policy. The objectives break out specific steps needed to achieve that goal. For example, in the case of the tobacco-free campus policy, the goal is to get the policy passed by the college or university. The objectives can include generating a certain number of local stories in the press, producing letters to the editor, sending emails to segmented sections of the student body, getting a certain number of hits on a Facebook page, etc. All the goals and objectives should combine to create a successful campaign that has the best chance of creating pressure on campus decision makers to adopt the policy.
2. **Identify your target audience** — What individuals or groups need to be reached in order to create pressure on the campus decision makers? What is the role of the broader campus community, and how can they be mobilized to contact the decision makers? What role do students play, and how do you best reach students? Should faculty be influenced and how are they best reached? How should messages be framed to other key

campus officials to garner their support for this policy? Fortunately, many of the answers to these questions likely emerged in the context of the one-on-one sessions conducted as part of the assessment and coalition development process. But more conversations with more people on- and off-campus may be needed to better understand who the key audiences are.

3. **Develop your message** — If your coalition developed an issue brief, much of this work is already done. It has provided justification for the policy and has framed the call to action. It is important to keep your message somewhat simple. The coalition should address no more than three or four messages over the life of the campaign. These points should already be included in the issue brief, and talking points, but may need revisiting or revision as the work proceeds. The value of having just a few key points is that all the coalition members can be saying the same things when they speak in support of the policy. See Tables 6 and 7 for examples of key talking points to support the campus policy. This consistency in messaging will serve the group well as the campaign proceeds.
4. **Develop story ideas** — How will the coalition tell the story of tobacco use and associated problems? It is your story to tell. How can you shape it to influence the likelihood that people will act on your call for action? Perhaps the crux is that non-smokers are being affected by those smoking on campus. Or maybe talking about the unsightly

cigarette butts on the ground will strike a chord with students and faculty. Perhaps a video of people smoking just outside a classroom or campus sporting event is a compelling story to tell. Although the story is only part of the media advocacy campaign, it is a very important one. The coalition should play a major role in developing the story. After all, the members will be the ones who tell it. Another vehicle for telling a story is the photovoice approach. Photovoice allows people to record and discuss their community's strengths and weaknesses, engage in conversation about these topics and reach policymakers. For more information on how to use photovoice to engage the community and advocate for tobacco-free campus policies, see the Photovoice page in the TRU toolkit, developed by the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

5. **Define action steps** — A media advocacy campaign needs many voices, and everyone in your coalition has a role to play. Because there are many moving parts to the effort, a media advocacy action plan is essential. The action plan is the “who will do what, by when” part of the process. Media advocacy will be strengthened by including the following action steps:
 - Generate a calendar of media opportunities with a plan for how to use each.
 - Identify a list of key media contacts and establish who will reach out to and build relationships with them.
 - Identify which print and electronic media will reach your target audiences and who will meet with representatives from each.
 - Write letters to the editor or communicate via other media sources such as blogs.
 - Build a tracking system for monitoring the various media pieces on your issue.

Although the above steps may not constitute a comprehensive media advocacy plan, they do get your coalition well on its way to effective use of local media sources.



STORY IDEAS SHOULD BE:

- Timely
- Relevant
- Unusual
- Unexpected
- Close to home



CULTURAL COMPETENCY REMINDER

When planning your media campaign, consider the perspective of minority students, including sexual, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and those with disabilities. Include messages or images that represent all facets of the student body. This may include directing messages toward the LGBT community, including pictures of the American Indian or African-American populations, or reaching out to certain populations through events and gatherings.

When thinking about who can speak in favor of your policy, consider individuals from minority populations. This may include LGBT students who have been affected by tobacco use or African-American students or professors who support your cause. Having representation from all involved parties will strengthen your case and help ensure that no sectors of the population are omitted.

Using Social Media

When developing your media advocacy plan, an important tool to include is social media. These various forms of communication often speak to a younger generation. Using tools such as Facebook, Twitter and blog posts will reach a wide population and convey and frame your message to one of your prime targets: college students. Talking to students on campus to determine what forms of social media are popular is important to discover the best way to reach them. Social media outlets are constantly evolving, so informally ask individuals on campus to elicit this information. On Facebook, you can create a page around your policy goals to build followers and supporters. Use the page to post upcoming events, spread your talking points and discuss the value of a tobacco-free campus. Similarly, Twitter users can develop followers and can Tweet facts, figures and reasons to support a tobacco-free policy on your campus. Both of these social media platforms keep interested individuals informed about issues related to the coalition's tobacco-free policy campaign. Be sure to stick to your talking

points and key points discussed in your issue brief; this is another way to make the coalition's mission public and recognized. The following are tips from successful media campaigns that have used social media as an advocacy tool (West, 2011):

- **Think visually:** If you are sending out an email blast or posting on Facebook, consider using videos or images to supplement the text.
- **Be selective:** One or two posts per day on each social media site are plenty.
- **Integrate social media:** Link your Facebook page to your Twitter feed, and blog to emphasize a united front.

Overall, it is important to consider social media as part of your media campaign. There are online resources available for specifics on how to create a Twitter, Facebook, or blog account and explore these options to reach your target populations. This is a great way to engage students in your policy campaign. Students are often tech savvy and well aware of which social media tools are popular, so consider inviting students to be part of the coalition for the specific task of leading the social media campaign.

Addressing Other Tobacco Policies

The media steps described above are applicable to all policy campaigns regardless of the specific policy being proposed. What will differ are the media audiences, the framing and talking points used, the stories told and the specific media sources used. For example, banning all tobacco promotions on campus will require very different framing and talking points than passing a tobacco-free campus policy. A coalition could choose to focus on how promotions affect the health of students and campus personnel, the negativity of the images associated with tobacco advertising in the community and the normative messaging they send about tobacco use. The decision makers may be the same for many campus policies, but that should not be taken for granted; messaging must always be targeted to the right people.

Conducting a media advocacy campaign for a community tobacco policy will require the same elements, but the specifics and tactical considerations will differ from campus policy campaigns. First and foremost, the decision makers are different. They may be part of a target organization or they may be elected officials, but almost certainly they will pay attention to different media sources. Thus, the stories being told will require careful framing and content to appeal to your target audiences.

Summary of Policy Step 6

The media part of the campus policy campaign is one of the most important parts of the work and should be provided ample time and resources to make it happen. Don't hesitate to use social media. Someone in your coalition will likely know how to effectively use this type of media. If not, ask a student supporter of your policy to assist with developing and creating regular posts.