



# *Harm reduction for local drug policies*

Getting Your Act Together –  
Shaping Messages for different  
Target Groups

# Messages

## Are most effective when they are....

- Simple (message fits audience)
- Concise (message fits issue and audience)
- Appropriate in language (language fits message and audience)
- Consistent (format fits content)
- Credible (spokesperson/messenger fits message and audience)

# Defining your target audience

## Concentrate your efforts where they have the greatest impact

1. Those most directly affected by the issue
  - People most affected by a problem often do not believe they have the power to change their circumstances.
  - It is important to empower and include this group to solve the problem within their own community.
2. Leaders of institutions
  - institutions hold a great amount of community power
  - institutional leaders have the power to mobilize their constituencies through both formal and informal influence

# Defining your target audience

## 3. Other community leaders

- give you a foothold with the media, government, religious groups, businesses, schools, etc. they are linked to
- Community leaders should be a part of every effort to spread a message through the community

## 4. The community at large

- this mobilizes support from sources that the catalyst organization may not think to contact directly
- it increases awareness to more people in the area about what you do and brings your issue to the forefront

# Five Elements of Messages

## 1. Content / Idea

- **refers to the central idea of the message**
  - What is the main point you want to communicate to your audience?
  - What single idea do you hope the audience will take away after receiving your message?

## 2. Language

- **consists of the words you choose for communicating your message**
  - Is the language appropriate for your target audience?
  - Is the word choice clear, or could it be interpreted differently by various audiences?
  - Is it necessary to use a local dialect , vernacular or jargon to communicate the message?

# Five Elements of Messages

## 3. Messenger / spokesperson / source

**refers to the person giving the message**

- Who would your audience listen to?
- Who is the most credible person to communicate to your audience?
- Who could bring your message across in a natural way?

## 4. Format / medium

**consists of the medium you use for communicating your message**

- Which medium is most likely to reach your target audience?
- Which medium/format is the most appropriate to convey your message?
- Is it necessary to use different formats to communicate the message to reach different target groups?

# Five Elements of Messages

## 5. Time /place

refers to where and when you give your message

- What is the right time (event, time of year, time of day etc.) to reach your target audience
- Where is the right place to reach your target audience (at big events, during political debates, in certain settings etc.)?
- Are there any events or dates when your issue is usually on the agenda (e.g. world Aids Day)?

Adapted from Ritu R. Sharma An Introduction to Advocacy - Training Guide, SARA/AED Advocacy Training Guide

# Communicating Messages – where

- Face-to-face meetings
- Briefing packages
- Public rallies
- Fact sheets
- Policy forums
- Posters
- Flyers
- Petitions
- Public debates
- Press releases
- Press conferences
- Contests
- Media spots (TV/Radio)
- Information seminars
- Events (sports, concerts etc.)

**Know your Audience!**

Different audiences need different formats!



# Communicating Messages - How

**USE YOUR FULL NAME:** Your name conveys information about your organization in a way that an acronym just doesn't. Remind your audience of who you are and what you believe in every time your organization is identified.

**NEVER ASSUME:** Your audience doesn't know nearly as much about your organization as you do. What's the problem you're addressing, and why should they care? Start there every time, rather than assuming they already know the answer.

**REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT, REPEAT:** In our society, we're bombarded with thousands of messages from corporations, politicians, and nonprofits every day, and it takes repetition to break through.

**ADD BENEFITS, NOT FEATURES:** Features are what your agency does. Benefits are the solutions you provide to problems. People do not buy in to features, but to solve problems.

Adapted from: Marketing communication for Nonprofits and other do-gooders, Mission Minded , 2010

# Example 1: Policy Makers

- Policy makers have little time and many constituents.
- Make sure you choose the person that has the power to do something for you
- Choose the one thing that you want to accomplish and want support for. Seek to match the policy-maker's current political issues
- Consider approaching a civil servant instead. Often they are easier to access and know the field better.
- Give them the facts and move them to action quickly
- Leave information to read later, e.g. briefing packets or fact sheets.

*Politicians constantly make use of evaluations and statistics (...) to justify their actions (and) strongly advocate (...) evaluation of the impact of their policies on the public since, at local level in particular, such measures are directly at the mercy of public opinion.*

*On the other hand, politicians generally do not have first-hand professional experience in their particular fields of responsibility and research considerations are not necessarily the prime determining factors in their decision-making. Instead, their decisions tend to be based on political (including party political) and economic factors, as well as on public opinion, which often only reaches politicians indirectly via the media.*

# Understanding policy processes

- A critical element in the success of any advocacy effort is a thorough understanding of the policy process. This understanding includes
  - how issues are identified;
  - how policies are formulated and implemented;
  - which institutions and individuals are involved;
  - what are the roles, relationships, and balance of power among institutions and individuals;
  - how, when, and where to act to achieve maximum impact from advocacy efforts.
- Opportunities to influence policy and policymakers can arise at any time.

# Understanding policy processes

- In-depth knowledge of the policy environment can help identify and recognize advocacy opportunities and critical points of entry both to influence the policy process and guide the selection of advocacy issues.
- Monitor the political, economic, sociocultural, and technological environments to keep abreast of emerging issues and the positions of government, political, religious and local leaders with respect to these issues.
- Demonstrate a clear and accurate understanding of the process followed and the players involved in making policy decisions.

Adapted from Networking for Policy Change: TB/HIV Advocacy Training Manual, WHO 2007

## Example 2: The Media

- News sources often use positive images and labels to highlight viewpoints they support and negative images and labels to derogate view points they oppose.
- Journalists and media people are often seen as biased, but most good journalists are committed to the truth, and to bringing that truth to the public.
- In order to do this, they typically try to use examples that most people will understand and identify with.

# Effective Media Advocacy

**Changing the media's perspective on community issues involves two different aspects:**

1. To frame your message to convey the ideas you want the media and the public to understand and act on.
2. To work directly with individuals of the media to help them understand the complexities of the issues and to present them clearly without oversimplifying them.

# Effective Media Advocacy

- Help to frame news stories to show the influence that politics, economics, health policy and stereotyping have on the issue.
- Work with media representatives to help them understand those issues more clearly and present them more straightforwardly.
- Show the media – and, through them, the public and decision makers – that community problems can only be solved by community effort.



# Effective Media Advocacy

- Be a trustworthy, knowledgeable, and accurate source of information.
  - If your media contacts know that they can believe what you say they'll trust your explanation of your issue.
- Guide the media to stories that highlight the underlying causes of the issue and suggested change .
  - But remember: the story should still focus on individuals
- Show the media the actual conditions, services, organization that you're advocating for.
  - Experiences often speak louder and more convincingly than words.

# Effective Media Advocacy

- Be reasonable.
  - Don't expect that one conversation or visit is necessarily going to change the way your issue is presented.
  - Don't get angry or accusatory – that's usually a way to make sure you don't get what you want.
- Keep at it, even after you've succeeded.
  - The memories of both the media and the public are short.
  - If you don't keep pushing the proper presentation of your issue, it's likely that it will fade, and you'll be right back where you started.
- Claim the most positive symbols/ labels to promote your view, and use negative symbols/labels to represent the opposition's views.

# Creating Media Bites

- The media can't afford to waste a lot of time on in-depth coverage of an issue.
  - Even a full-length story on the evening news, after all, may be only 90 seconds long.
- Media bites are 10 to 15 second quotes or catchphrases
  - They give the core of a story and are used to grab the audience's attention.
  - They contain important information and well-known symbols meant to evoke strong emotion in a viewer, listener, or reader.

# Creating Media Bites

## DO...

- Keep it short and simple (“KISS”)
- Divide more complex ideas into several short sentences or phrases.
- You can use humour, but avoid being cute or too funny.
  - You don't want to downplay the seriousness of your issue, but you do want to win the audience's sympathetic attention.
- Rhymes, alliterations, or puns are familiar and friendly literary devices that connect easily with an audience.
- A reversal or satirical rephrasing of a well-known corporate slogan can deflate the novelty and popularity of your opposition's ads.

# Creating Media Bites

## DON'T...

- Be preachy, judgmental, alarmist , whine or threat.
- Use symbols, slogans and pictures that have lost their freshness and impact due to overuse.
  - To get an idea of what kinds of symbols are being used these days, find out what "bites" your media sources, colleagues, and competitors use.
- Come unprepared
- Construct media bites that capture the essence of your advocacy goals before you send out information packets to the media or show up for an interview. Come prepared with relevant, informative, and lively quotes that promote your viewpoint and may make headlines.

Adapted from A. Whitman: Changing the Media's Perspective on Community Issues , in Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.ku.edu>