

MEDIA ROLE IN PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCACY



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ABSTRACT

Policymaking is a political process which is affected by various social and economic factor; media systems play an integral role in shaping the social context in which policies are developed.

A sound and effective behavior change communication strategy should be based on an overarching vision of what needs to be achieved to address a particular issue. The strategy should be integrated, have a long-term focus, should be responsive to individual behavior change needs, and should maximize the potential for change on a broader societal level. Frameworks such as the PBC and the “P” Process for project design and implementation are useful tools to guide the process of developing policy communication strategies that get results. A combination of science, facts, vision, stakeholder buy-in, and audience participation is essential for success.

I. INTRODUCTION- Public Policy Advocacy

A growing body of research makes clear that more and more foundations are seeking to leverage their assets—money, knowledge, and connections—in order to have a greater impact on public policy. At the same time, there are clear signs from the field that foundations are paying increasing attention to the role of communications in their work—in ways that go far beyond the annual reports, press releases, and grant lists of yesteryear. The forces driving these more robust communications activities include the desire to achieve impact; the commitment to transparency; and the need to respond to the increasing scrutiny from policy makers and the media around the value of foundation activities (Breindel, Howard. 2008).

Through the media, citizens learn how government policies will affect them, and governments gain feedback on their policies and programs. Media systems act as the primary conduit between those who might want to influence policy and the policymakers controlling the scope of political discourse and regulating the flow of information.

Public policy Advocacy is the effort to influence public policy through various forms of persuasive communication. Public policy includes statements, policies, or prevailing practices imposed by those in authority to guide or control institutions, community, and sometimes individual behavior.

II. THEORIES OF COMMUNICATION IMPACTS ON BEHAVIOR

Over the last 70 years, social scientists have advanced various theories of how communication can influence human behavior. These theories and models provide communicators with indicators and examples of what influences behavior, and offer foundations for planning, executing, and evaluating communication projects.

Ideation Theory (Kincaid, Figueroa, Storey, & Underwood, 2001). This theory (Cleland, 1985; Cleland et al., 1994; Cleland and Wilson, 1987; Freedman, 1987; Tsui, 1985) refers to new ways of thinking and the diffusion of those ways of thinking by means of social interaction (Bongaarts and Watkins, 1996) in local, culturally homogeneous communities. Recent socio demographic literature has identified ideation and social interaction as important determinants of fertility decline. This perspective amounts to a shift from macro level structural explanations to micro level decision making explanations of demographic change.

Stage/Step Theories. Diffusion of innovations theory (Ryan and Gross, 1943) traces the process by which a new idea or practice is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. The model describes the factors that influence people's thoughts and actions and the process of adopting a new technology or idea (Rogers, 1962, 1983; Ryan and Gross, 1943, 1950; Valente, 1995). The input/output persuasion model (McGuire, 1969) emphasizes the hierarchy of communication effects and considers how various aspects of communication, such as message design, source, and channel, as well as audience characteristics, influence the behavioral outcome of communication (McGuire, 1969, 1989). Stages of change theory, by psychologists J.O. Prochaska, C.C. DiClemente, and J.C. Norcross (1992), identifies psychological processes that people undergo and stages that they reach as they adopt new behavior. Changes in behavior result when the psyche moves through several iterations of a spiral process—from precontemplation through contemplation. Preparation, and action to maintenance of the new behavior (Prochaska et al., 1992).

Cognitive Theories. Theory of reasoned action, by M. Fishbein and I. Ajzen, specifies that adoption of a behavior is a function of intent, which is determined by a person's attitude (beliefs and expected values) toward performing the behaviour and by

perceived social norms (importance and perception that others assign the behavior) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Social cognitive (learning) theory, by A. Bandura, specifies that audience members identify with attractive characters in the mass media who demonstrate behavior, engage emotions, and facilitate mental rehearsal and modeling of new behavior. The behavior of models in the mass media also offers vicarious reinforcement to motivate audience members' adoption of the behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

Social Process Theories. Social influence, social comparison, and convergence theories specify that one's perception and behavior are influenced by the perceptions and behavior of members of groups to which one belongs and by members of one's personal networks. People rely on the opinions of others, especially when a situation is highly uncertain or ambiguous and when no objective evidence is readily available. Social influence can have vicarious effects on audiences by depicting in television and radio programs the process of change and eventual conversion of behavior (Festinger, 1954; Kincaid, 1987, 1988; Latane, 1981; Moscovici, 1976; Rogers and Kincaid, 1981; Suls, 1977).

Emotional Response Theories. Theories of emotional response propose that emotional response precedes and conditions cognitive and attitudinal effects. This implies that highly emotional messages in entertainment (see chapter 4) would be more likely to influence behavior than messages low in emotional content (Clark, 1992; Zajonc, 1984; Zajonc, Murphy, and Inglehart, 1989).

Mass Media Theories. Cultivation theory of mass media, proposed by George Gerbner, specifies that repeated, intense exposure to deviant definitions of "reality" in the mass media leads to perception of that "reality" as normal. The result is a social legitimization of the "reality" depicted in the mass media, which can influence behavior (Gerbner, 1973, 1977; Gerbner et al., 1980).

III. PROCESS OF BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Many theoretical models and frameworks can guide the strategic design process; we will use a framework known as the Process of Behavior Change PBC. The PBC framework recognizes that behavior change - and thus communication intended to influence behavior change - is a process. People usually move through several intermediate steps in the behavior change process.

Furthermore, this framework suggests that people at different stages constitute distinct audiences. Thus, they usually need different messages and sometimes different approaches, whether through interpersonal channels, community channels, or mass media.

An audience can generally be described as: (O'Sullivan, G.A., Yonkler, J.A., Morgan, W., and Merritt, A.P, P.8, 2003).

- **Pre-knowledgeable:** Is unaware of the issue/problem or of their personal risk.
- **Knowledgeable:** Is aware of the issue/problem and knowledgeable about desired behaviors.
- **Approving:** Is in favor of the desired behaviors.
- **Intending:** Intends to personally take the desired actions.
- **Practicing:** Practices the desired behaviors.
- **Advocating:** Practices the desired behaviors and advocates them to others.

It is important to understand where the audience is in relation to these elements before embarking on a strategy. Progress from one element to the next increases the probability of behavior change and continuation.

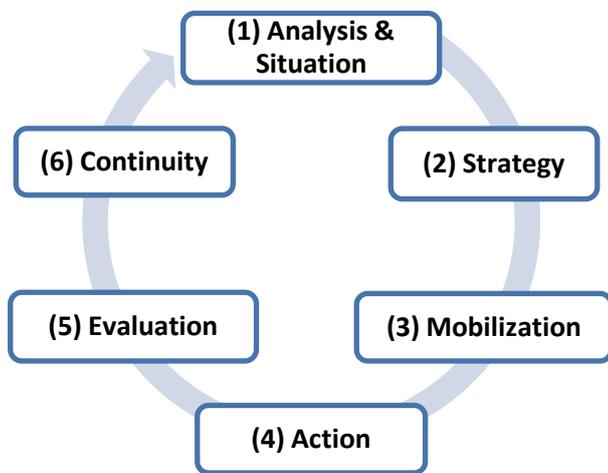
Public policy and communication strategies influence both individual and collective change, establishing new community norms and, over time, providing support for stronger and more effective policies and programs. The PBC can play an important role in creating an enabling environment to support new behaviors. Advocacy is a key element in this process and can help make the desired behavior sustainable.

Strategic communication is based on a combination of:

1. Data, ideas, and theories integrated by
2. A visionary design to achieve
3. Verifiable objectives by
4. Affecting the most likely sources and barriers to behavioral change, with the
5. Active participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries.

In other words, strategic communication takes advantage of science and facts, in addition to ideas and concepts, to set forth a long-term vision and realistic behavior change objectives to address a policy issue. The vision and objectives are developed through dialogue with the intended audience and various stakeholders. In the dialogue process, both the "senders" and "receivers" are affected, moving toward mutual adjustments and convergence. A blending of science and art is essential to crafting a sound strategy.

The PBC framework can work effectively together with a comprehensive project design and implementation approach known as the "P" Processes (Health Communication partnership, December 2003, p.3).



(1) Analysis of the Situation

Developing a policy communication strategy demands in the first place that you understand all the factors that may have an impact on communication efforts.

Such an understanding, known as the analysis of the situation, serves as the guide for all communication activities. Policy communicators use the analysis of the situation to observe, gather, organize, and assess relevant factors. These factors include the nature and extent of the issue/problem, audience characteristics, available resources, and the communication environment.

Analysis is the first step to effective communication strategy, just as it is the first step to any effective action. Communication activities designed to have an impact on public policy start with accurate information and in depth understanding of the problem, the people involved, the policies, the implementation or non-implementation of these policies the organizations, and the channels of access to influential people and decision-makers. The stronger the foundations of knowledge on these elements, the more persuasive the communication activities can be.

Key questions are:

- What are the problems?
- What are the existing policies that cause or related to those problems and how are they implemented?
- How would changes in policy help resolve the problems?
- What type of policy changes is needed (legislation, proclamation, regulation, legal decision, committee action, institutional practice, or other)?
- What are the financial implications of the proposed policy change?
- Who are the stakeholders associated with the desired policy change?
- Who are the advocates and supporters?
- Who are the opponents?
- Who are the decision-makers?
- Who are the undecided or swing voters?
- How are changes in policies made at different levels?
- What is the communication structures related to policy-making?
- What are the channels that reach policy-makers?
- What is a credible message for policy-makers?

(2) Strategy

Every communication effort needs a strategy. The strategy phase builds upon the analysis phase to direct, plan, and focus on specific goals and to position the communication effort with clear paths to achieve those goals and objectives.

- Establish a working group to develop a strategy and plan activities.
- Identify your primary and secondary audiences (pro, undecided, and competition).
- Develop your SMART objectives (specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic and time bound).
- Position your issue to offer key decision-makers a unique and compelling benefit or advantage.
- Follow a model for policy change that suits the situation and communication objectives.
- Identify your resources and plan to build coalitions and mobilize support. Seek out and work with appropriate partners, coalition advocates, spokespersons, and the media. Identify your competition.
- Plan activates that are the most appropriate for your intended audience.
- Refine positions to achieve a broader consensus. Minimize the opposition or find areas of common interest as often as possible.
- Prepare an implementation plan and a budget.
- Plan for and combine multiple channels of communication, including personal contacts, community media, mass media (print, radio, TV), and social media such as email and internet.
- Develop intermediate and final indicators to monitor the process and evaluate the impact.
- Give the proposed policies or policy change an appealing name, easily understood and designed to mobilize support.

(3) Mobilization

Coalition-building strengthens communication. Events, activities, messages, and materials must be designed with your objectives, audiences, partnership, and resources clearly in mind. They should have maximum positive impact on the policy-makers and maximum participation by all coalitions' members, while minimizing responses from the opposition.

- Develop an action plan describing the situation, intended audience, the audience impacted by change, communication objectives, key activities and timelines, and indicators to evaluate each activity.

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- Encourage all coalition partners to participate actively.
- Plan events incorporating credible spokesperson from different partner organizations.
- Delegate responsibilities clearly to coalition members to implement and monitor specific events and activities.
- Network to enlarge coalitions and to keep them together.
- Organize training and practice in communication skills.
- Identify, verify, and incorporate key facts and data to support your position. Compile data/documentation which supports your position and which shows importance of taking action.
- Link your position to the interests of policy makers.
- Present information in a brief, dramatic, and memorable fashion.
- Incorporate human interest and anecdotes into your messages.
- Specify desired actions clearly.
- Emphasize urgency and priority of recommended action.
- Plan for and organize news media coverage to publicize appropriate events, present new data, and credit key players.
- Rally visible stakeholders support.

(4) Action

Keeping all partners together and persisting in making the case are both accentual in carrying out communication strategy. Repeating the message and using the credible materials developed over and over helps to keep attention and concern on the issue.

- Monitor and respond rapidly to other news and opposition moves. Be flexible.
- Carry out planned activities continuously and on schedule.
- Establish a means to keep all coalitions members informed of activities and the results.
- Develop and maintain media support with personal contacts, press releases, press conferences, and professional assistance.
- Do not fear controversy and try to turn it to your own advantage.
- Avoid any illegal or unethical activities.
- Hold policy-makers accountable for commitments.
- Keep a record of successes and failures.
- Monitor public opinion and publicize positive changes.
- Acknowledge and credit the role of policy-makers and coalition partners.

(5) Evaluation

Communication efforts must be evaluated as carefully as any other communication campaign. Since communication efforts often provide partial results, you need to measure regularly and objectively what had been accomplished and what more remains to be done. Process evaluation may be more important and more difficult than impact evaluation.

- Establish and measure intermediate and process indicators.
- Evaluate specific events and activities.
- Document changes based on initial SMART objectives.
- Compare final results with indicators to measure change.
- Identify key factors contributing to policy changes.
- Document unintended changes.
- Share results. Publicize successes in a clear and understandable manner to stakeholders.

(6) Continuity

Communication strategy is ongoing process rather than a single policy or piece of legislation. Planning for continuity means articulating long-term goals, keeping functional coalitions together, and keeping data and arguments in tune with changing situations.

- Evaluate resulting situations.
- If desired policy changes occur, monitor implementation.
- If desired policy changes do not occur, review previous strategy and action, revise, repeat strategy process or identify other actions to be taken.
- Develop plans to sustain/reinforce change.
- Persevere.

IV. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS

Public communication campaigns are an attempt to shape behavior toward desirable political or social outcomes (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Those behaviors might include getting a mammography, voting, or volunteering. The outcomes of those behaviors – the campaigns’ ultimate goals – may include specific policy results that lead to better outcomes for individuals, families, or communities.

Very rarely do public communication campaigns feature *only* communications through media channels. Usually they coordinate media efforts with a diverse mix of other communication channels, some interpersonal and some community-based, in order to extend the reach and frequency of the campaign’s messages and increase the probability that messages will successfully result in a change (Dungan-Seaver, 1999).

This mix of communication channels is called the “air” and “ground” strategies. The air strategy is the public media campaign and the ground strategy uses community-based communications or grassroots organizing.

All campaigns are different and use different interventions. The common thread running through them is their focus on similar results – trying to influence what people think, think about, and do.

Public communication campaigns use the media, messaging, and an organized set of communication activities to generate specific outcomes in a large number of individuals and in a specified period of time (Rogers & Storey, 1987).

Two Types of Campaigns

Various literature and thinking about public communication campaigns makes a distinction between two types of campaigns based on their primary goals: individual behavior change versus public will and political change. Table 1 lists characteristics of these two campaign types.

Campaign Type/ Goal	Individual Behavior Change	Public Will
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence beliefs and knowledge about a behavior and its consequences. Affect attitudes in support of behavior and persuade. Affect perceived social norms about the acceptability of a behavior among one's peers. Affect intentions to perform the behavior. Produce behavior change (if accompanied by supportive Program components). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase visibility of an issue and its importance. Affect perceptions of social issues and who is seen as responsible. Increase knowledge about solutions based on who is seen as responsible. Affect criteria used to judge policies and policymakers. Help determine what is possible for service introduction and public funding. Engage and mobilize constituencies to action.
Target audience	Segments of the population whose behavior needs to change.	Segments of the general public to be mobilized and policymakers.
Strategies	Social marketing.	Media advocacy, Community organizing and mobilization.
Media Vehicles	Public service/affairs programming; Print, television, radio, electronic advertising, social media.	News media; Print, television, radio, electronic advertising, social media.
Examples	Anti-smoking, mobile phone usage during driving, seat belt usage....	Health care policy, women discrimination policy.....

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V. CONCLUSION

A sound and effective behavior change communication strategy should be based on an overarching vision of what needs to be achieved to address a particular issue. The strategy should be integrated, have a long-term focus, should be responsive to individual behavior change needs, and should maximize the potential for change on a broader societal level. Frameworks such as the PBC and the "P" Process for project design and implementation are useful tools to guide the process of developing policy communication strategies that get results. A combination of science, facts, vision, stakeholder buy-in, and audience participation is essential for success.

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