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TIP SHEET #12



Media Advocacy

Media advocacy can be broadly defined as “the **strategic** use of mass media to support community organizing and advance healthy public policy.” It can be further defined as a tactic for community groups and others to shape public debate by communicating their own story in their own words to those with influence, and to apply pressure on decision makers to promote social change.¹ The difference between media advocacy and social marketing is that media advocacy involves building relationships with reporters, writing letters to the editor, and promoting news stories that attempt to reframe policy issues, while social marketing uses advertising to relay its messages. Below are the basic concepts of media advocacy to consider as you develop your campaign.²

1. Place the problem in context.

- Tobacco use is a social issue and not just an individual problem.
- The relationship between tobacco and rodeos has a long history.³ The tobacco industry has been successful in promoting spit tobacco as a social norm of rodeo events, and community members may or may not share your views at first.

2. Develop an overall strategy.

- Define the problem you want to address so that you can focus your media strategies.
- Develop clear short-term and long-term policy goals that will shape your organizing activities and media advocacy strategies.
- Identify those with the power to create change, such as rodeo organizers.
- Identify community members such as civic leaders, the clergy, and youth leaders who can act as spokespeople to help you apply pressure on the rodeo organizers (or others who make policy decisions).
- Develop messages tailored to a target audience that can create change. This may be the rodeo organizers and/or people who are in a position to put pressure on the rodeo organizers.
- Identify people who might oppose your efforts. Try to determine what they may do or say, and how to counter their arguments.

3. Identify media resources. Build relationships with print and electronic media outlets by, for example, contacting reporters to let them know you're available to provide information about rodeos and tobacco sponsorship; sending out press releases about newsworthy activities (see item # 5 below); and sending letters to the editor whenever it seems appropriate.

4. Reframe the issue of tobacco sponsorship of rodeos. Through their years of mass product promotion and sponsorship efforts, the spit tobacco industry has tried to link the marketing of their products to American values important to rodeo culture, such as “freedom of choice” and “loyalty” (to companies that have supported rodeos). You can reframe the issue by discussing those values in terms of being loyal to the community and the families who attend rodeos by keeping rodeos safe and healthy. Tobacco sponsorship is harmful to the community, not helpful; addiction affects adults' ability to choose freely; and sponsorship sends unhealthy messages to children. Following are three examples of specific framing statements.⁴

- Rodeo as a sporting event, not a spitting event: *“Tobacco sponsorship doesn't belong at rodeos, where athletes have to be in excellent shape in order to compete.”*

A photograph in a newspaper of a cowboy ex-tobacco user who has been disfigured by cancer of the mouth may be worth a thousand words about the harms of spit tobacco.

- Roots of rodeo as a community event: *“The tobacco company is not from around here; they only come to the rodeo to advertise their deadly products. Our rodeo should have healthy sponsors.”*
- Industry Manipulation: *“The tobacco industry doesn’t really care about our rodeo; they’re using it to sell their deadly products.”*

5. Decide how your message will be delivered.

- **Find experts to talk to the media.** Examples include a former tobacco user and oral cancer survivor; a rodeo cowboy/cowgirl and ex-tobacco user who has seen the effect of spit tobacco on his/her rodeo friends; a parent who is outraged at the promotion of tobacco at a rodeo event.
- **Match your messenger to the media.** Some spokespeople do better on television, some on the radio, and others in print. For example, a photograph in a newspaper of a cowboy ex-tobacco user who has been disfigured by cancer of the mouth may be worth a thousand words about the harms of spit tobacco.
- **Make your issue newsworthy** by, for example, publicizing violations of the Smokeless Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (STMSA)⁵; pointing out how extensively tobacco companies advertise during rodeo events; placing oppositional advertising that will get media attention; or holding events or protests.

¹ Wallack, L. and Dorfman, L., *Issue 1: What is Media Advocacy?* Berkeley Media Studies Group, January 1997. <http://www.bmsg.org/content/21.php>.

² Much of the information in this Tip Sheet is drawn from *Bucking Tobacco Sponsorship at Rodeos: Strategies for Media Advocacy and Public Engagement* by the Berkeley Media Studies Group and Public Media Center. The full text is available http://www.bucktobacco.org/resources/docs/rodeo_report.pdf.

³ See the Tip Sheet *How and Why Tobacco Companies Sponsor Rodeos* for more information.

⁴ Op. Cit, *Bucking Tobacco Sponsorship at Rodeos*.

⁵ For more information about the STMSA, see the Tip Sheet *Legal Fact Sheet on Limiting Tobacco Sponsorship at Rodeos*.