

Lesson 15: Getting Out the Message

Goals/Purpose

This lesson and its tips will help you and your youth become more familiar with and comfortable using various forms of media to get your message out in order to build power to win your issue

Objectives

- Define what the media is
- Explain how the media can help the group reach its goal
- Develop sound-bites for your issue
- Describe strategies for engaging the media's interest
- List tips for talking to the media

Total Time: Two and a half hours over several meetings.

Agenda/Activities

- Icebreaker
- Group discussion
- View video
- Create sound-bites
- Role plays

Facilitator Preparation

- Set up VCR and Video
- Prepare poster sized Sound-bite Grid w/examples (a sample chart is in this lesson)

Materials Needed

- Newsprint and markers
- Poster-sized Sound-bite Grid w/examples

Tools

- Sound-bite Grid
- Guidelines for Good Sound-bites
- Getting Your Story Covered

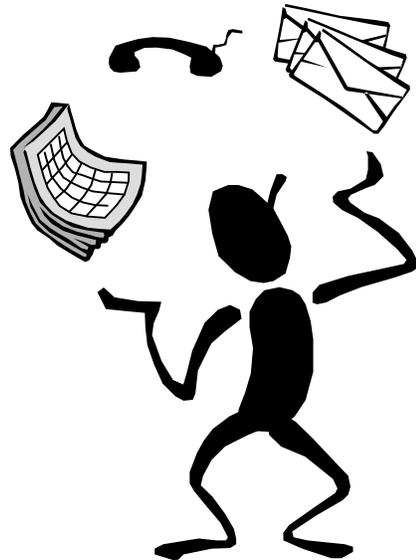
The Basics

The media is a very powerful and essential tool for getting your group's message out to both the people who might support you and to the people you are trying to influence (your targets). Using the media well helps you to build your power to win your issue.

This section contains information and activities that you can use with your group over several meetings. The areas of focus are defining what the media is, creating sound-bites and messages, and talking to the media. There are activities for the large group and for smaller groups of volunteers. As the adult leader, you will be taking a leadership role in working with the media. For that reason, there are several sections that are addressed solely to the adult leader.

This section is not an in-depth guide to working with the media but a guide to helping young people gain knowledge and skills about getting their message out. You will need to supplement it with other information in order to be able to write good press releases, get media coverage for your event, and develop relationships with the press. There are many resources out there to help you. The Midwest Academy's Book *Organizing for Social Change* has a good chapter on media that includes "how to's" and media checklists.

Chances are there is a person in your organization who knows how to work with the media. Work closely with that person when developing your lessons and communicating with the media.



1. What is the Media?

15 minutes

Materials: Newsprint and markers

Media advocacy is a strategy that we use in community organizing to get our message out to our Targets, allies and constituents. It is another way that we can build power to win issues and make changes that improve peoples' lives.

Activity: Discuss “What Is The Media?”

a. Talk with the group about the role of media in the campaign. The media is a means to get their message out and build power. Media can include many different forms of communication. A concept that can help the group define media is that of channels. Channels are paths, and the media can provide a lot of different paths along which information can be communicated. The internet and newspapers are examples.

b. Ask the group what types of media they use. Then ask them what other types of media their friends and family use. Record the responses on newsprint.

In the discussion, bring out:

- Daily papers
- Weekly papers
- Radio
- Major TV networks
- Cable TV
- Public access TV
- Magazines
- Neighborhood and organization newsletters
- The internet



c. To round out this discussion, ask the group to identify the types of media they think the target most likely uses to get his or her information. Underline or circle these on your list.

d. Tell the group that they will most likely get media coverage through articles in the newspaper and interviews on TV or radio. When we create our messages, we will focus on getting this type of coverage.

2. Accessing the Media

45 minutes

Materials: VCR, *Accessing the Media* video

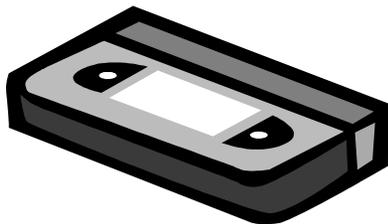
Activity: Discussion about what makes a story interesting

- a. Talk with the group about how there's only so much space or time to cover stories. For a story to get published it has to be news of interest to readers/viewers.
- b. Ask the group what kinds of stories they pay attention to. In the discussion, bring out:
 - Exciting stories about war, crime
 - Heart warming stories about people, pets
 - Stories about young people doing good things

c. View and Discuss Video

Show "Accessing the Media" - A 12-minute video that will help you understand how to get media coverage. The video includes instructions on how to focus your message and pitch your story/event, etc. (Although the clothing styles in the video are out-of-date, the video's message is relevant to today's youth.) The tape also includes a Discussion Guide. \$24.95, ACTA Publications, 1-800-397-2282.

If this video is not available, use the article at the end of this module to discuss the same issue.



The following questions will help lead your discussion of the video:

Ask the group:

In the discussion, bring out:

1. Did this group have a message? What was it?	Broken promises
2. What was so interesting to the media about this story?	Involved real people, talking for themselves
3. What other things did you learn?	How to get to the media
(Note to Leader: Additional questions are provided with the video)	

Youth Tobacco Ordinance Considered by City Council

By Chris Dault
STAFF WRITER

The Jefferson City Council is planning to decide next week on whether or not to pass the "Tobacco-Free Youth Ordinance."

The ordinance, already in effect in places such as schools, is hoped to reduce the youth purchase rate of tobacco products. The bill is being sponsored by several different groups including the youth organization YEMET (Youth Eminent Gain Movement) By Town, The Centre County Tobacco Prevention Council and The American Cancer Society among others.

YEMET has been conducting community walk surveys in markets that include merchant who sells. Information is reported documenting the amount of visible tobacco advertising around schools and public parks.

The Tobacco-Free Youth Ordinance would prohibit tobacco advertising within 1000 feet of schools and parks and would require that stores keep cigarettes in locked cabinets. The ordinance also requires licensing of tobacco retailers and bans the marketing and distribution of "tobacco give" to minors.

The Centre County Tobacco Prevention Coalition claims that selling cigarettes from "self-service" displays is against the law.

Tobacco

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said. Centre County Public Health Director Wanda Decker said, in a prepared statement, "We know that when tobacco products aren't sold from self-service displays, but are locked up behind the counter and require a clerk to actually hand the cigarettes to the youth, the rate of illegal sales drops. We also know that removing glassware locking advertising from around schools helps. Sign back against tobacco industry advertising."

Current law requires that stores check proper ID from anyone who looks to be "under 21" years of age and requires them for illegal sales.

3. Craft the Message

45 minutes

Materials: Poster-sized Sound-bite Chart with examples, Guidelines for Good Sound-bites handout, Sound-bite handout

For the Adult Leader: Sound-bites

To get coverage in the mainstream media, you will need to create sound-bites. What exactly are sound-bites? They are short quotes that serve as a central, characterizing feature of a broadcast or print news story. Media scholars use the term “bites,” or “memorable moments,” to describe attention-getting statements that evoke an emotional response in the receiver. One media critic has called sound-bites the verbal or printed equivalents of bumper stickers

Your group’s sound-bites are short messages that convey the important points you want to communicate about your issue. When crafting your message, you want to come up with sound-bites that people will listen to and remember. Sound-bites should be three things: simple, single and succinct. Imagine your message on a billboard along the freeway, or try writing it on the back of your business card. If it won’t fit, it is probably too long.

One reason sound-bites are used is because there are extreme time and space limitations on the media. A full-length story on the evening news averages about ninety seconds. Your message must be conveyed in a 10- to 15-second sound-bite if you are to take advantage of the opportunity to frame the issue as a social problem in which the public has a stake. If you are being interviewed, you should create your messages in advance. Using your sound-bites, rather than just answering a reporter’s questions, will promote your cause effectively.



Activity: Creating Sound-bites

a. Tell the group that no matter which part of the media we aim at, before we can approach them with our stories, we have to decide what our overall message is. What kind of messages do we have in mind? To stimulate this discussion, ask the group what they tell their friends and family about the issue they are working on. Write this up on newsprint.

Let them know that their messages need to be able to fit onto a bumper sticker. These media bumper stickers are known as “sound-bites,” short messages that convey the important points the group wants to convey.

b. Let the youth know that we are now going to practice turning the group’s issue into a sound-bite, using the formula shown in the sound-bites chart (below). The chart illustrates the example of getting a city council to pass an ordinance that requires tobacco retailers to have a license. Show this example to the group.

c. Then divide the group into two or three smaller groups. Give each group a blank chart—either poster sized or a handout—and the Guidelines for Good Sound-bites (found at the end of this lesson). Have the groups fill in the grid to the best of their ability.

d. Come back together in a large group, and share the results.

e. Ask for a volunteer to help you further “wordsmith” the sound-bites. You may want to work with someone in your organization as well. Many organizations have staff who are skilled in working with the media.

Guidelines for Good Sound-bites

- 1) Be concrete. Use images that are fresh and surprising.
- 2) Avoid slogans and don’t be judgmental.
- 3) Be brief, and divide longer ideas into short sentences.
- 4) Humor is ok, but don’t make fun of yourself. Biting humor can be effective in conveying a sense of outrage.
- 5) Know that what you say is important. Your expertise in your issue is powerful. Convey your authority.
- 6) Reframe the Target’s message, for example, “People have the right to smoke” could become, “People have the right to breath.”
- 7) Remember, the goal is not to earn yourself applause, but to advance your public awareness goals.



3. Getting the Story to the Media

40 minutes

Materials: Newsprint and markers, Tips for Talking to the Media handout

Activity: Role play with small group

This activity should be conducted with a small group, e.g. 2 or 3 people, who you have selected or who have volunteered to be the group's spokespersons. The role play will prepare them to talk with a reporter – either a newspaper, TV or radio journalist.

- a. Review the sound-bites you have developed, then review tips for talking to the media (see the Tools section of this lesson).
- b. Then have the group brainstorm a list of questions a journalist might ask during an interview. The adult facilitator should add any questions s/he thinks might be asked.
- c. Ask the participants to be either the reporter or the interviewees. If there are three participants, two can be interviewed together. Do two or three role plays, enough for each person to have the experience of playing the two roles or reporter and interviewee.
- d. After the role play, discuss what went well and what could be improved. If you or the group feels the need to do more role plays after this discussion, do them.
- e. At the next meeting, have this small group present a role play to the large group.



Tools – Lesson 15



Sound-Bite Grid

Element	Example
<p>Conclusion. A sound-bite always begins with the conclusion.</p>	<p>Tobacco retailer licenses protect our youth.</p>
<p>Evidence. Offer one or two brief points of explanation, elaboration or support.</p>	<p>Merchants who sell tobacco to youth will face losing the right to sell tobacco and will therefore lose a lot of money.</p>
<p>Action. Explain how it will affect the viewer/reader or what action you want them to take.</p>	<p>Call your city council person and urge them to protect youth by passing the tobacco retailer licensing ordinance.</p>



Guidelines for Good Sound-Bites

You know a good sound-bite when you hear it.

- 1) Be concrete. Use images that are fresh and surprising.
- 2) Avoid slogans and don't be judgmental.
- 3) Be brief, and divide longer ideas into short sentences.
- 4) Humor is ok, but don't make fun of yourself. Biting humor can be effective in conveying a sense of outrage.
- 5) Know that what you say is important. Your expertise in your issue is powerful. Convey your authority.
- 6) Reframe the Target's message. For example
Target says, "Kids are the problem. They are the ones who are buying the cigarettes and breaking the law."

You say, "The tobacco industry targets youth to buy cigarettes."
- 7) Remember, the goal is not to earn yourself applause, but to advance your public awareness goals.

For the Adult Leader: Getting Your Story Covered

There are several ways community groups can get their message out to the media. Once you determine your local media channels and the people who work there, you can pursue several different avenues. Most groups find the following to be the most effective:

- **Press Releases.** You or someone in your organization writes a story and sends it to the media. A good press release will contain your key points, sound-bites, the name of your organization, and the name and phone number of a contact person who a reporter can call for more information.



- **Actions and events.** You can get the media to cover your group's rally, presentation to city council, or other event. Plan good visuals since you may have TV cameras there. You may send out a press advisory or press release to let the media know about it. If the media come to your event, make sure you have designated spokespersons to talk with reporters. Seek out the reporters so that you can get your sound-bites into the story.



- **Interviews and Talk Shows.** You can get invited to participate in local radio and TV shows.

- **Letters to the Editor.** Writing letters to the editor is an excellent way to get extra mileage out of a story and a good way to keep the issue in the public eye.

- **Opinion Pieces and Editorials.** You can meet with the editorial board of your local newspaper and ask them to write an editorial on your issue, or give you space to publish an op ed piece that you or a member of your group writes.

- **Press Conferences.** You can hold a press conference for the media. Your chances of getting it covered are slim unless you include some action, like releasing a report.