

Telling Your Story

**A Guide to Preparing
Advocacy Case Studies**

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The Advocacy Institute
1629 K Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20006-1629
Tel: (202) 777-7575
Fax: (202) 777-7577
Email: info@advocacy.org

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“I left that meeting...convinced that we as a movement had to do something and soon.... the history of it all struck me – the forces of one powerful arm of the progressive movement, appealing to the others for help.”

Quoted in **The People Rising: The Campaign Against the Bork Nomination**,
by Wendy Schaetzel and Michael Pertschuk

Introduction

When advocates come together – whether in an informal situation or a professional gathering – we often find ourselves retelling the events from our latest project or campaign. We compare notes and exchange strategies, all without formal classroom structure. The learning comes in the form of stories, or, as we are calling them here, case studies.

Within the advocacy community, our stories are told and retold. Debriefing sessions or campaign victory parties provide one forum for the exchange of stories; newsletters and annual reports provide another. Advocates try to look past lessons to guide their future actions; often, they have to “reinvent the wheel” with too little guidance from those who have fought previous battles. We believe that they should have more opportunities to read, hear, and learn from each other’s experiences.

We have prepared this guidebook to encourage activists to record their stories, in the hope that written case studies will come to play a more important role in, and contribute to the building of, the advocacy community. We believe that it would be beneficial for advocates and students of advocacy to communicate experiences that will stimulate and teach others working toward social change. Our hope is that all communities interested in pursuing social causes will both write and use case histories.

Case studies can teach the advocacy community about itself – cases impart not only the dry details of an advocacy campaign, but offer insight into the people who brought about change. Some case histories may only be a paragraph long, but they all convey the excitement of advocacy. Case histories are not only records of change but also act as agents of change.

We have set out to clarify the methodology of, and the reasons for, writing an advocacy case study. The body of the guidebook is made up of four sections. First, we discuss the importance of and reasons for writing a case study. Second, we look at methods for selecting a focus for the case study. The third section offers a few hints on writing a case study, and the final section focuses on what to do with the finished product.

“[A] volunteer coordinator expressed [her] feelings about the signature drive: ‘[I]t was the sort of thing where we just jumped in. For people who liked to take risks, this was a very positive type experience. There was also a lot of people who were terrified, but everyone that I talked to who ended up collecting signatures did feel that it was a very positive experience for them, even if at times an unpleasant one.’”

From *Taking Initiative: The 1990 Citizens’ Movement to Raise California Alcohol Excise Taxes To Save Lives*, a case study by the Advocacy Institute

The Purpose of Advocacy Case Studies

We define advocacy as organized efforts to effect systemic or incremental change. Whatever the issue, advocacy campaigns seek to involve citizens in the policymaking process. Whatever the level - community, state, or national - activists use similar advocacy strategies. Local PTA members organizing to keep sex education in school employ the same skills and techniques as other activists who lobby the city council, or Congress, for better laws to protect consumers.

Case studies are stories about people and how they can make a difference. Every story of an advocacy campaign – book length or paragraph length – teaches other advocates something unique, and is an advocacy case study. These historians can address different questions, involve diverse communities, vary in length, demand few resources or many, and teach one or more lessons. By recording events, you can show others how to take initiative in their own communities, working on their own issues. Stories of all kinds serve the advocacy community.

Case Studies can transcend distinct issue areas, and play an important role in training both professional and citizen advocates. Through case studies, activists teach each other both specific lessons of their campaign and stimulating ideas about how to make a difference. Cases can ask: How did activists bring their goal to the attention of the media? How were the issues “framed” in the literature used? Were culturally specific symbols used to motivate the constituency? How did events lay the groundwork for further advocacy efforts in the community? How did campaign leaders overcome specific obstacles? How did people make a difference? A case study gives a reader confidence that someone else’s experience can be used as a model for a personal or group endeavor.

Case histories can accomplish a number of goals:

- **Inspire Action.** By examining the specific ways others have attempted to achieve social change, advocates gain the confidence necessary to take the first steps. Case studies demystify and make accessible the public policymaking process. A well-written case study provides a group or an individual with a sense of the possible.
- **Transmit Advocacy Skills.** Case studies teach specific techniques: alliance building, media advocacy, public interest lobbying, and grassroots mobilization, among other skills. A successful case study demonstrates the effectiveness of particular strategies and points out potential pitfalls.
- **Develop an Advocacy Community.** Issue advocacy can be a lonely experience. Different issue campaigns have much in common with each other, but advocates rarely have an opportunity to share experiences. Case histories provide an opportunity to create or expand advocacy networks across geographic or issue lines.

- **Strengthen Community.** Writing a case study of a successful campaign celebrates community participation, recognizes activists, and strengthens the base for future advocacy actions. Coalitions and community groups can build on a sense of accomplishment and history.
- **Create a History of the Advocacy Movement.** Case studies provide a forum for recognition of activist efforts. As we build our collection of cases, we document the history of actions. Case historians also provide a forum for reflection.
- **Develop Issue Perspective.** Understanding the overlap between issue areas not only creates a sense of community among advocates, but also gives advocates perspective about the way their issue relates to others. Looking at a campaign in a new way reveals coalition building possibilities. Similarly, issue advocates gain strategic perspective through case histories, understanding alternative and back-up approaches.
- **Test Models.** Case histories provide a broad look at strategies used in issue campaigns. Advocates can compare their plans with what worked for someone else, and what didn't.
- **Broaden the Appeal of Advocacy.** Service providers and advocates often work separately, as do professional and citizen advocates. Case histories can begin to bridge these gaps, by highlighting similarities and areas of common interest.

Public policy advocates should have access to a comprehensive body of case histories about various advocacy strategies, opportunities, resources, failures, and successes. We need to fill in the gaps in the available body of advocacy case studies – few, if any, case histories chronicle the obstacles facing victories won by advocates in low-income communities or communities of color, for example. Recording a story to add an unheard perspective to the advocacy community is always valuable, as is writing down a campaign story simply to supplement existing case studies.

Choosing A Focus

A case study is more than telling a scattered story; you need to keep a moral in mind. As important as it is to record any advocacy effort, a case history with in-depth descriptions of every event may be too detailed for many potential readers. The most effective case study focuses on one aspect of the campaign and distills its lessons from the outset. Concentrating on the strategies you used rather than the circumstances of the actions can make your case study widely accessible and applicable.

Some elements that can serve as the case's focus include: issues, players, alliances, techniques, strategists, opponents (levels of spending, strategies), marshalling resources, or making the most of opportunities. Most campaigns will involve many of these elements. However, one aspect may stand out – as having had a significant impact, as being particularly successful, or as an unusual technique. You should ask: What is special or inspiring about this campaign? How can this case study make an advocate's work more effective in the future? What goals will the case history serve? The specific element that you choose will provide a focal point for your analysis of the campaign – how this strategy affected the outcome and whether it should be used in the future.

Below is a list of elements that usually play a role in an advocacy effort – the list is by no means exhaustive:

- **Coalition and Alliance Building.** Who joined together to facilitate this campaign? How were people working with different agendas brought into the network? Where did negotiations break down between constituencies? Discussing unlikely allies and interesting ways to identify common interests can inspire readers to look beyond traditional partners. For example, a case history might examine how a traditional religious organization and a domestic violence advocacy group overcame differences to work together in response to a recently released violent movie.
- **Media Advocacy.** How did advocates access and utilize the media in the course of the campaign? Were there opportunities to tie the campaign issue with coverage about an unforeseen event? A case study focused on media strategy might detail how advocates for highway safety used “55 Saves Lives” to frame their issue in order to garner popular support for the implementation of new speed limits.
- **Using Symbols.** What symbols did campaign activists use to mobilize a constituency? Were culturally-specific approaches a help or hindrance? Advocates from the Native American community fighting the use of “Indian” names in major league sports used the symbol of the brave to galvanize their communities. A case study might address how this usage played out in the mass media.

- **Lobbying:** Which specific lobbying techniques were particularly creative, or which backfired? Why? Was a large constituency important? Did a letter writing or telephone campaign take advantage of the campaign's grassroots support? Or were the lobbying efforts of a few key people instrumental? When a national bill on recycling came up, legislators received thousands of paper plates from constituents urging representatives to pass it. A case study could inspire previously untried tactics.
- **Information Dissemination and Communication.** How did campaign leadership get the word out? Did innovative systems, such as on-line electronic communication, play an important role in promoting widespread awareness of campaign issues? Were newsletters, alerts, flyers, posters, or ads used or misused? Tobacco control activists were able to follow the progress of Philip Morris' tour of the Bill of Rights, mobilizing hundreds of activists at each stop with electronic computer conferencing. While the on-line notes provide some sense of the campaign already, a case study on the value of computer conferencing might explain how this technology can work to advocates' advantage.
- **Grassroots Organizing.** How did campaign organizers inspire interest in the community? How did they inspire action from the community? Were there any missed opportunities or particular difficulties? Did the impetus for change come from within the community or was it introduced by outsiders? A case study could compare the leadership styles of two campus organizers mobilizing support for a pro-choice rally.
- **Opposition Strategies.** Did the campaign's opponents pose a particularly difficult obstacle? Were specific strategies employed that could turn the tables on their media coverage? How did proponents take the offensive? When confronted with the David and Goliath nature of their campaign, activists against establishing a nuclear power plant were able to expose their opponents as willing to manipulate community values in the interest of corporate profit – a case study could detail the excitement of that unlikely victory.

If a campaign employed a particularly innovative technique which has high potential for other campaigns, a case study will be effective regardless of the campaign's ultimate success or failure. If you specifically want to inspire others, it may be best to concentrate on the obstacles that campaign proponents overcame on the way to success. If your goal is to increase awareness about the issue at hand, a failed campaign can serve to spur further action. Issue activism may be sparked when the case study points to an "enemy," or the opposition, that won the campaign for lack of an alert public interest community.

As a final consideration, you may not want to focus on aspects of the campaign that succeeded or failed for extremely specific and uncommon reasons. When a *deus ex machina* saves the day without activist involvement, the campaign story will not convey lessons for future actions. Public policy advocates need to know that lessons they derive from case histories can be used for their own campaigns.

“I began to overhear a different kind of discussion among the lobbyists: ‘Who’s going to chair the Monday meeting this month?’ ‘What do you think should be on the agenda?’ ‘How should we handle this?’ Everything was geared to trying to reach consensus, not be divisive but to share information. Everybody was an intelligence gatherer...So there was an application of the principle that everyone’s needed. That’s a very important form of coalitional culture.”

Quoted in **Giant Killers**, by Mike Pertschuk, about the campaign against the MX Missile

Recording Your Story

A case study provides its author with a valuable opportunity to think through his or her campaign's lessons. Reflecting on what worked, what didn't, and why, means activists writing down their stories can move on without leaving their work behind, as well as prolong the excitement of the action itself. Other community activists will know their efforts have been recorded, and may be encouraged to participate in further actions. Recording your story can mean writing it down, talking into a tape recorder, or enlisting a writer to document a larger campaign.

There is no one formula for recording a campaign or a strategy; the format of a case study should always be informed by its focus. Additionally, presentation formats can vary: some campaigns may lend themselves to videos or slide shows. If activists have access to a video camera, video recordings lend an immediacy and inside perspective to campaign events.

Most stories will be divided into a narrative of what happened, and comments on why. For example, a case could explain how public health advocates from the African-American community stopped marketing and production of PowerMaster Malt Liquor because of egregious targeting by the alcohol industry. The following elements may be helpful in thinking through the structure of a case study:

- **Background.** This element should establish the context of an issue for a reader not previously familiar with the problem. A reader should be able to gain sufficient information to understand and appreciate the case study. The "Background" should outline the basic facts and setting of the issue campaign, especially the barriers that need to be overcome. This section could discuss general patterns of targeted marketing and introduce the community leaders who initiated the PowerMaster action.
- **Narrative.** A case should include only those facts necessary to provide resonance to the lessons. The case study should be engaging as a story. Readers may respond to an exciting narrative when abbreviated lessons may leave them cold. This section could explain how campaign activists whitewashed bulletin boards advertising malt liquor in their community, gaining media attention and popular support.
- **Discussion and Conclusions.** Most importantly, a case study should be sure to highlight the implicit lessons of the story. Bulletins can be used for easy identification. Advocates should be able to extract strategies, techniques and other important lessons to apply to their campaigns. One lesson in bold print can strengthen the focus of a story. The PowerMaster campaign could teach how one innovative and visible action can spur an entire campaign.

“[A] member of Friday Night Live remembers meeting that morning to discuss what they would say at the press conference: “We didn’t have a script...they were there mostly to reassure us with what we were doing, [to] say, ‘Hey, you guys can do it.’ You know...they were all adults, and we were like the kids who this stuff was being directed at so they wanted our input. They didn’t want to sit there and tell us, you say this...[They said], ‘Just go up there and tell ‘em what you feel, what you think, how it affects you in your life.’ And we were like, ‘O.K.’...[We were] speaking from the heart.””

From Using the Media to Prevent Alcohol Promotion to Youth: A Case Study

These elements hold equally for those writing down their own experiences and for those telling their stories to others. Here are some tips on beginning the process of writing a case study once you have decided to record a campaign: Collect all relevant campaign documents, including internal memos, press releases, and lists of participants. Or go to the library to make copies of newspaper coverage of the campaign. If you haven't decided on a focus, jot down key themes, or moments that jump to mind or reflect turning points in the campaign. It might help to make a timeline, emphasizing events around the focus that you have chosen. Write down a sentence about the key lesson you wish to convey.

Conversely, here are ten pitfalls to avoid:

- Don't try to tell too much. A case study isn't a chronicle of everything that happened. Concentrate on the lessons that you – and others – can learn from your experience. Tell just enough of the background so that a stranger to your issues can understand what happened and why.
- Don't tell too little. Readers (or listeners) should be able to get a feel of the opportunities and threats you had to face, so the lessons you learned come alive.
- A case study is not the place to get even with your opponents, or convince the reader how evil or venal they were. Try to get some distance from the passions of the campaign, and describe the actions of your opponents with as much objectivity as you can muster.
- A case study is not the place to reargue the issues. You're trying to capture the strategic and tactical lessons you've learned. For that purpose, all a reader needs to know is what the fight was all about, so the case study should briefly state your objectives, and give some basic insight into the nature of the conflict.
- Don't assume that the reader will know much about you or your issues. Double check your drafts to make sure you haven't used names (especially acronyms) and technical terms that will confuse someone unfamiliar with your issue and the players.

- But don't be afraid to tell a good story. Some of the drama, some of the humor, some of the "blood, sweat, and tears" of the story can make it come alive – and keep a reader's attention.
- You don't have to name names to write about mistakes and failures. Some of the most important lessons are negative – opportunities missed and human failings. Don't be held back from giving others the benefit of these lessons – you can describe them generally, without embarrassing or alienating allies.
- Don't be afraid to tell how you messed up. Everybody does. If you are open about the mistakes you made, people will be more inclined to believe you when you write about your smart moves.
- Don't let publication of your study be an unpleasant surprise to any of your important allies. Share early drafts of the case with all the key players. They may be able to add a perspective, and you will keep them in the loop.
- Don't worry about giving away secrets. Of course, you don't want to write anything that will give opponents ideas about how to win the next fight. But opponents usually know a good deal about your tactics, and will not be surprised by much you write. Being too secretive can mean losing the opportunity to teach others concrete lessons learned.

“We try to put ourselves in the position...to respond to an opportunity, and this was just an opportunity that came along and presented itself to us. It was an issue that we knew would be of concern to people in the community as well as of concern to people in our office.”

Quoted in Using the Media to Prevent Alcohol Promotion to Youth: A Case Study by Lori Dorfman for the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention

Distributing Completed Case Studies

Case studies contribute to the larger advocacy community. A case study can spread lessons across issue and geographical lines, relating experiences between East Coast drug prevention advocates and Midwestern environmentalists. Until better networks exist, identifying distribution outlets requires some creativity. It is important to connect with other constituencies in the community, to bridge generation gaps, to reach out to both volunteers and professionals, and to inspire and mobilize a wider audience.

Case studies can be published – in different versions – in a variety of forums. Publishing the case study in an organizational or community newsletter can be an important first step. Most national and regional advocacy groups have newsletters that are distributed widely. Additionally, organizational mailing lists can provide an interested audience for the case study. By using these channels, the story may reach beyond its most obvious constituency.

Additionally, you may want to consider publishing your case study in the national press. Magazines or trade journals are usually searching for interesting stories about localized action; look for opportunities to connect your campaign to widely covered issues or trends. Closer to home, local media outlets may be appropriate; a newspaper that covered the campaign might be interested in publishing an edited version of “how the campaign was won – or lost,” especially if the story had local angles or people. Publishing a case study of a successful campaign can give public credit to important allies.

Other organizations working in the same issue area will be interested to hear about the campaign outcomes. Advocates in these groups may be able to use their own channels of distribution. Here are additional outlets to consider:

- Make sure advocates mentioned (favorably) in the case study get copies and encourage them to disseminate it widely.
- Send copies of the case study to legislators or government officials; let them know that their performance and voting patterns are being recorded and distributed to active citizens.
- Attach a copy to a fundraising proposal.
- Take a copy to the local librarian; urge him or her to keep and maintain it in a civic participation file.
- Post a version of the case study on electronic networks. Always include a name and number for more information.
- Bring copies of the case study to meetings with fellow activists.

- Send a copy of every case study to the Advocacy Institute, to the attention of the case study librarian.

Most importantly, you should keep in mind a case study's potential to teach widely. People working in your issue area – in other geographical regions – should receive the story, as should advocates working on different issues nearby. Different aspects of the story will attract and assist different advocates, but the study will always be valuable.

“After the campaign was over, a lawyer in town called me up and said, ‘I just have to let you know that when I read these articles about multi-million dollar lobbying campaigns being waged on either side, I have a distinct memory of you standing in the lobby of the Hilton Hotel in San Francisco with your two shopping bags, handing out leaflets left and right.’ That was the reality of organizing.”

Quoted in **The People Rising: The Campaign Against the Bork Nomination**

Conclusion

Although you may never have come across a document officially defined as an advocacy case study, we tell our stories all the time: everyone has a story to share. Advocates' stories build community, teach strategy, and create history. Most importantly, advocacy case studies inspire hope.

This guidebook has discussed the process of producing a case study of those stories. There is, however, another aspect to consider: using case studies is as important and fruitful as writing them. Just as you provide tools to other advocates with case studies you write, you will learn of new ways to develop future campaigns from other people's efforts.

We want to create a demand for advocacy case studies. Activists will begin to write case histories when they begin to see how useful they can be to their own work. You may find that using case histories of other campaigns will also give you a better sense of what is valuable when putting down your stories.

Distributing a copy of this guidebook will hopefully encourage members of other organizations or groups to write case studies of their own campaigns. Passing case studies from group to group can expand networks of advocates who will, in turn, use and produce case histories. We should know each other's stories.

“[T]his was a losing vote at which 40 or so people gathered. It became almost celebratory. The mood was fine. The mood was upbeat. One of the comments that was often made was, ‘Well, what a hell of a party this would be if we had won!’”

Quoted in **Giant Killers**

Appendix I: Tips for Writing on Others' Campaigns

Recording your own story is the main focus of this guidebook. However, activists and students of advocacy may be interested in seeking out and writing the case histories of others' campaigns. Most of the points discussed above are applicable, but some additional considerations come into play.

Identifying a good campaign to chronicle may be one of the hardest parts of preparing a case study as an "outsider." Sources of ideas may be a newspaper story, a TV or radio segment, a contact in the field, or a campaign with which a related organization is currently involved.

Additionally, you should consider the available resources before committing to chronicle a particular campaign. In order to write a convincing case study from an "outside" perspective, you will need time, finances, and – most importantly – access to participants and campaign advocates.

When an outsider chronicles a campaign, his or her outside perspective will necessarily affect the focus of the case study and will require respect for diverse perspectives. The case writer must develop a relationship of trust with the subjects of the study. If confidentiality precludes open discussion between the case study's author and the campaign participants, the case should focus on another campaign.

Inside writers and outside writers will encounter different roadblocks and have different advantages. As an outsider interested in recording a campaign, you may want to consider whether an insider/outsider team would be most effective. Similarly, advocates who recognize the importance of recording their experience but who feel too close to the campaign should ask an outsider to record the events.

Case histories are worth allocating some organizational time, either written from the inside or allowing an outside observer access to participants and files. Advocacy organizations should be receptive to case writers hoping to chronicle campaigns, circulate case studies when possible, and include as many communities as possible in considering which stories to tell.

“Shortly after the vote on Bork, I went to a meeting of the Democratic National Committee, and found an air of pride over this victory that I had not seen in a long time. Essentially what I heard was people saying, ‘We did it! We won it! This proves we can win it!’ ...It really was something to be proud of, because it meant standing up for your principles and winning, and they felt they hadn’t been able to do that for awhile.”

Quoted in **The People Rising: The Campaign Against the Bork Nomination**

Appendix II: Tips for Writing Longer Case Histories

If time and energy permit, a more comprehensive case study may be appropriate and exciting. Case studies can appear as book length chronicles of a campaign as well as paragraph summaries and anything in between. Organizing the tremendous amount of information becomes the primary challenge when writing a longer case study.

Choosing one focus or aspect of the campaign – coalition building or the media strategy – is as important in longer case histories as in shorter ones. Attempting to chronicle everything – soup to nuts – is probably unwise no matter how long the case study is.

For more comprehensive case histories, research consists of standard background reading, other case histories, and issue campaign files. Interviews with campaign participants are useful and can be a significant ingredient of an engaging longer case study. Different perspectives can illuminate hidden strategies and tactics. Some suggestions on interviewing for a case study include:

- During interview, it is important to attempt to gain an understanding of people's feelings and motivations, not just a narrative of the campaign's events. Be sensitive to individual biases about the campaign. Do not give your opinion of the campaign or any particular person's actions during an interview; you don't want your interviewee to think that you will be commenting on his or her actions at the next interview.
- Knowing who to interview and when is also critical. Make sure to include people not directly involved in the campaign, i.e., journalists who covered the events, special interest groups, etc. Begin by interviewing people who were peripherally involved in the campaign, and work up to the central players, so that you will know more, and be able to make the most of key interviews. Get lists of people to talk to from each potential interviewee; this helps establish who is in touch with whom.
- Don't cut people off if they respond in an unexpected vein; let them help determine the course of the interview. You can always go back for more specific information, and allowing them to guide the discussion may yield more interesting stories.
- Don't worry about asking questions that might seem uninformed. You should try to learn as much about the campaign as possible.
- Assure interviewees that they will have control of their voices in the final piece; always check with the interviewee before the final draft is distributed.

- Quotations in the body of a case study provide the reader with insight into not only the events but the feelings and experiences of advocates involved in the campaign.
- Quotations can make a case study personal and lively, but if overused they lose their communication potential. They should highlight lessons and insights. The organization of a longer study can also help identify and clarify the lessons to be learned. Some writing and organizational tips follow:
- Major participants in the campaign should be identified as early on in the case study as possible. If the case is long, this list can be an appendix. When discussing a winning strategy it is helpful to use names. However, anonymity should protect less successful advocates.
- Concentrate on conflicts of opinion within the campaign. Explore debates both among proponents and between opponents. Show how they were resolved, or explain why they were not.
- In longer and more detailed case histories, the opposition should be discussed as fairly as possible. Consider the possibility that the opposition might obtain a copy of the case study. Check with interviewees to determine which inside secrets should not be revealed.

Interviewing and organizing make up the bulk of the additional work that goes into a longer case study. While you might choose to write a quick page about an innovative media scheme you developed with a local action, it may be worth spending the time to record the general outline of a larger campaign. A longer case study is often simply a specific focus contextualized by a larger outline.

Appendix III: Sample Advocacy Case Studies

Three case studies follow. Written about different campaigns with different focuses, these cases illustrate a range of case study formats. There are some similarities, however. All three were written by “outsiders,” who either monitored the campaign or interviewed participants afterwards. And all three case histories describe successful campaigns. (For a longer case study about a lost campaign, contact the Advocacy Institute for a copy of *Taking Initiative: The 1990 Citizens’ Movement to Raise California Alcohol Excise Taxes to Save Lives.*)

- **CITIZEN ACTION ON ALCOHOL PREVENTION EDUCATION**

Note: For confidentiality reasons, individual and organizational names have been deleted from this short case study.

It all started with a TV ad, one touting Anheuser-Busch’s “Family Talk About Drinking” consumer education program. Apparently, Governor Bob Martinez, now director of the Office for National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), saw the ad, was impressed, and directed his staff to include the material (it is not clear whether he or anyone else gave the program any more study) in his office’s recommended prevention programs listing.

Fortunately, a beer company’s prevention philosophy caught the attention of a staffer at ONDCP, who, unable to change the course of events there, made a quick phone call to a youth anti-drug and alcohol activist group, alerting them to the situation and asking the organization to pull out all the stops to knock the A-B guide off the list.

Faced with the need to act immediately, the group telephoned and faxed information to about 30 kindred agencies – state prevention coordinators as well as grassroots activists, with a request for immediate letters – preferably faxed – to Governor Martinez to protest the inclusion of pro-drinking materials in the Office’s prevention recommendations. Two days later, after the storm of protest reached critical mass at ONDCP, the Governor was ultimately convinced that his earlier decision had not only been unwise, but unpopular.

This “campaign” depended on good “inside” contacts and quick reactions throughout a loyal and dependable network. Two days of flurry, and a major accomplishment – thwarting the alcohol industry’s quest for respectability as well as derailing efforts to pass the industry’s self-serving propaganda off as a bona fide prevention program. One regret expressed by the activist-organizer: that he was not “on-line” on ALCNET. Electronic message distribution might have reached more people, even sooner.

- **SUMMARY OF THE COMMIT ALVIN AILEY PROTEST**

A National Cancer Institute project, COMMIT (COMMunity Intervention Trial), is designed to test ways to raise the overall community awareness about smoking so that people understand it as a public health issue and not just an individual issue. One of the eleven test communities in the COMMIT program is Utica, New York.

One of the ongoing goals of the Utica COMMIT project is to reframe their community's perception of cigarette companies as upstanding corporate citizens and community leaders to enemies of society and 'merchants of death.' As a means of accomplishing that goal, they devised a media advocacy initiative centering around a protest of a Philip Morris-sponsored local performance of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company.

The protest was a response to Philip Morris' ongoing strategy of 'buying' social legitimacy through their sponsorship of various cultural events. The COMMIT project consisted of efforts to attain as much publicity as possible around a fairly simple 'media event.'

The media event itself was nothing more than the distribution of a pamphlet to theater patrons as they entered the Stanley Theater the night of the performance. The pamphlet was a simple, yet carefully researched example of creative epidemiology. Written by Utica COMMIT Project Director Russell Sciandra, the pamphlet encapsulated the entire point of the Ailey protest, i.e. that contributions to the arts do not make a cigarette company any less of an enemy to public health.

To re-frame Philip Morris' public role from patron of the arts to merchant of death and disease, the front page of the pamphlet contained the following bold message: "Philip Morris brings you more than art...they also bring you cancer, heart disease, emphysema, stroke, bronchitis, 135,972 deaths every year." This message also re-framed the slogan that appears on all advertising that accompanies Philip Morris-sponsored cultural events, "Philip Morris brings you the arts."

The death toll cited on the front of the pamphlet was significant in that it was not the more commonly cited number of 390,000 cigarette-caused deaths in the U.S. each year. Instead, the cited figure represented the deaths caused specifically by Philip Morris products (total number of deaths divided by Philip Morris' market share.) The resulting figure, although much lower than the more commonly cited total number, was more compelling in that it directly linked Philip Morris itself with an estimated number of deaths.

On the inside of the pamphlet, this connection was made even more clear by a chart labeled "Annual Deaths in U.S. Caused by Philip Morris, Inc." that listed the number of Philip Morris-caused deaths by disease (e.g., lung cancer – 43,185, heart disease – 45,230, etc.).

Most of the pamphlet was used for an explanation of the social consequences of cigarette company-sponsorship of public event:

When cigarette companies sponsor sports teams or racing cars, they are buying exposure on television and other media to which they otherwise would not have access. ...When they sponsor the arts, such as tonight's presentation by the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, they buy prestige and respectability. What they spend on the arts is only a fraction of the three billion dollars they spend every year on cigarette advertising and promotion, but it is enough to enhance their image as public benefactors. They hope you will forget where the money came from.

To emphasize the ability of Philip Morris to 'buy respectability,' Sciandra applied the concept of creative epidemiology to the corporation's finances: "In 1988, its profits amounted to ***\$190,000 per hour.***"

The pamphlet was also used to ask patrons to talk to their children about the hazards of smoking and to "let them know that throwing a few dollars to artists and dancers doesn't make Philip Morris a socially responsible company," thereby directly involving the patrons in the process of reframing the public perception of Philip Morris.

The pamphlet concluded with a request to patrons to "Help Alvin Ailey Dance Company break its dependence on the cigarette industry: make a contribution to support the company, but make it contingent on not accepting tobacco money in the future." This request again involved the patrons in the reframing process. The focus of the request was also important since any perceived attack on the Ailey Company would likely have backfired on the sponsors of the protests. By focusing on the Ailey Company's "dependence" on the industry, the protest framed them as a victim of Philip Morris exploitation and kept the focus of the protest on the enemy – the cigarette industry.

Janine Sadlik, Utica COMMIT field director, coordinated the effort to distribute the pamphlet on the night of the performance and to notify the media about the protest.

Because of a rainstorm that night, only one doctor, local surgeon Pat Ciaglia, showed up to hand out pamphlets and talk to the media. One other person was recruited to help distribute the pamphlets and the manager of the theater offered to set up a table for the pamphlets in the lobby. Because the Stanley Theater only has one entrance, and because Dr. Ciaglia was well known in the community, the effort was sufficient to make the message of the protest clear to both dance patrons and the media.

A press release summarizing the protest and the pamphlet, written by Sadlik, had been distributed to local newspapers, radio and television stations two days before the performance with an embargo that was lifted the night of the performance.

In addition, Salik made personal contact with people representing the area's two television stations, one newspaper and approximately 10 radio stations. Utica COMMIT had learned that this personal contact was a crucial part of any successful media initiative.

Soon after Utica COMMIT was established, they began notifying relevant media contacts whenever there was a local tobacco-related event or story or when they could offer a local spin on a national or statewide story. By the time of the Ailey Protest, Sadlik had established relationships with contacts at each of the area's radio and television stations and with several writers and editors at the local newspaper. These relationships had developed to the point where, shortly after the Ailey Protest, several media contacts were calling her on a regular basis asking for new leads.

These relationships paid off when the protests received coverage on both of Utica's television stations, each of which interviewed Dr. Ciaglia, and in the local newspaper where it received coverage in the review the performance itself. The final two paragraphs of Jonas Kover's review in the Utica Observer Dispatch (5/11/89) summarized the protest and quoted Dr. Ciaglia on his motivation for participating ("because cigarettes are helping to kill people.") The review ended by quoting a spokesperson for the Great Artist Series, the local sponsor of the performance, who claimed that the Series received no support from Philip Morris.

The review was important not only because it represented access to a media channel not normally utilized by health advocates, but also because it articulated the theme of Utica COMMIT's ongoing goal of identifying cigarette companies as enemies of the public's health. When the Great Artist Series spokesperson did not argue with the underlying premise of the protest but instead emphasized that the Series itself received no support from Philip Morris, it was a clear sign that the Series agreed with Utica COMMIT's contention that Philip Morris (and, by implication, all cigarette companies) are an enemy of society to be condemned and not applauded.

This media advocacy initiative was a success in gaining access to the media, including media channels that don't normally cover public health issues, and in using that coverage to frame a community event in a way that focused on the practices of the cigarette industry, rather than on the behavior of individual smokers. In addition, and significantly, the protest was crafted in a way to directly involve the public in this reframing process.

The coverage had been achieved because Utica COMMIT had creatively provided the media with a story to cover. As Russell Sciandra noted, "To gain the media's attention, you can't just say something, you have to *do* something. The protest gave the media something to cover and gave us a chance to have our message heard."

By accomplishing the goals of this single event, Utica COMMIT helped make the local environment more receptive to pro-health messages and initiatives while making it harder for cigarette companies to sustain an environment in which their advertising and promotion practices are seen as beneficial or even acceptable. Future Utica COMMIT initiatives that take advantage of opportunities as they arise will undoubtedly contribute to this process.

- **POST-IT: LOBBYING CREATIVELY IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST**

In recent years public funding for the arts has come under attack from religious and cultural conservatives. The resulting “culture wars,” and a climate of general budgetary conservatism, have largely put the arts community on the defensive, even as they have demonstrated the need, and provided the impetus, for the political organization of artists and art institutions around shared concerns. Battles in the “cultural wars” are usually confrontational, exhausting for artists and their supporters, and hard for the arts community to win. New Right and Religious Right cultural conservatives have effectively utilized their extensive grassroots networks to lobby against funding for the National Endowments for the Arts (NEA). Their successes can be largely attributed to their having effectively framed the arts funding issue in terms of defending “family values” and community decency standards against government-funded indecency, pornography, and “blasphemy.” With public debate framed in this way, advocates supporting the NEA are fighting an uphill battle.

Can the arts community gain access to policy-makers and effectively frame the issue of NEA funding to encourage public support for the arts? A recent example of public interest lobbying does just that. Utilizing the advertising potential of Post-it notes, the recent “Artifacts” campaign of the American Arts Alliance (AAA) demonstrates that creative lobbying can effectively access decision-makers. The Arts Alliance, a lobbying organization representing 2,600 presenting and performing arts institutions (including dance companies, theaters, operas, symphonies, art, museums, and presenters), focuses its lobbying efforts on NEA funding, as well as issues of general importance to nonprofit organizations, such as tax legislation and nonprofit postage rates.

“Artifacts”

In the months leading up to the “Artifacts” campaign, the Arts Alliance compiled and edited 16 facts and quotations they wanted to insert into the arts’ funding debate. These “Artifacts” resemble media bites. They are pithy, interesting, and easy to remember. “Artifacts” are intended to reframe public discussion about arts funding. Thirteen of the “Artifacts” stress the appropriateness of maintaining or even *increasing* funding for the NEA. For instance, “More tickets are sold to dance performances each year than to National Football League games;” “America’s Military Bands receive \$203 million per year, \$28 million more than the entire budget for the National Endowment for the Arts;” “Since its creation, the National Endowment of Arts has funded over 90,000 works of art, 32 have been controversial – less than one tenth of one percent;” and, “Annually, each American pays taxes of \$1,137.28 for the military, \$201.00 for education and 68 cents for the arts.” In addition, three widely-respected American Presidents – Dwight Eisenhower, Franklin Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan – were quoted on the significance of artistic liberty.

Post-it

The Arts Alliance faced a problem common to all lobbying efforts – *how* to get their message (in this instance, the 16 “Artifacts”) noticed by members of Congress. The solution AAA

came up with was to have their “Artfacts” custom printed on Post-it[•] (i.e., “sticky pad”) sheets. AAA printed an “Artifact” at the bottom of each Post-it. The center of each Post-it featured a very faint American Arts Alliance logo. Most of each Post-it remained free from individual note-making. Each Post-it pad included four different alternating “Artfacts” messages. AAA hand-delivered packets containing each of the four different pads to every Congressperson’s office in the spring of 1992. They also sent pads to the 26 appointed members of the National Council for the Arts, members of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, and selected members of the media.

Why Post-its? *Access* – with repetition. The Post-its represent a refreshing change from the typical lobbying letters that inundate congressional offices. The Arts Alliance packaged their message in a “user-friendly” form. People actually enjoyed – and used – the Post-it pads. By using the Post-its for routine note jotting, congressional staff actually participated in the “Artfacts” campaign. Each person with an Arts Alliance Post-it pad on their desk could potentially circulate each “Artfacts” message twenty-five times. And each Post-it message – if 3M’s own advertising claims hold true – is read three times before it is discarded. Through repetition, AAA hopes that its “Artfacts” will help reframe the art’s funding debate. “Artfacts” *are* creeping into the public debate. The Arts Alliance still receives occasional calls about the facts and the “Artfacts” campaign, and “Artfacts” have been reprinted in the media.

Looking forward, looking back

The “Artfacts” campaign could be imitated by other public interest organizations. Smoking-control advocates could also utilize facts and quotations to build momentum to raise cigarette excise taxes. Environmental activists could use Post-its to push for effective gas-guzzler legislation. Unfortunately, lobbying by Post-it is neither quick nor inexpensive. Staff and board members of the Arts Alliance talked about the possibility of a Post-it campaign long before they implemented it. The staff spent a great deal of time compiling, selecting, and editing suitable “Artfacts.” (They now keep a file of facts and quotations – updated regularly – to shorten the lead time on any future “Artfacts” initiative). The Arts Alliance took care to make sure that their facts were accurate and didn’t willfully distort data. They thought it best to assume that their facts would be scrutinized by their opposition.

The “Artfacts” campaign seems like a modest project, but it was not cheap. It cost about \$6,000 (not counting staff time) or about \$5 per packet of custom printed Post-its. Printing “Artfacts” on memo pads would have been much cheaper, but probably less effective. The “user friendly” aspect of Post-its was a deciding factor in AAA’s selection of Post-its to get out their message. One possible way to defray the cost of customizing Post-its would be to sell them to one’s membership, something the Arts Alliance was not logistically willing to tackle in this instance. Selling customized Post-its could be effectively incorporated into an organization’s fund-raising efforts, while also serving to involve one’s grassroots membership in ongoing efforts to reframe public debate. After all, what public interest organization would not like additional grassroots assistance in getting its message out to the broader public (as well as in targeting decision-makers)?

[•] *Post-it is a registered trademark of the 3M Corporation*

Broader lessons

One cannot frame an issue for legislators without somehow bending their ear or getting an argument across their desk. By this measure the Post-it campaign was a great success. Whether one initiates a lobbying effort modeled after the Arts Alliance's "Artfacts" campaign depends on the specific goals and resources of one's organization. However, the broader lessons of this campaign are applicable to any public interest lobbying effort.

- **Work at framing issues.** Important votes can be won or lost depending on how issues are framed. Public interest organizations are at a disadvantage when they fight the battles their opponents want them to fight. Through the "Artfacts" campaign, the Arts Alliance worked to frame public support for the arts in positive terms.
- **Be thinking of new and creative ways to access decision-makers.** Effective lobbying is attention grabbing. As the Arts Alliance demonstrated, one can lobby creatively without resorting to gimmicks.
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** Opinions are rarely changed by a single statement, no matter how carefully argued or cleverly worded. Changing the terms of public debate takes time. The "Artfacts" campaign is working until the last Post-it note is used and re-read.
- **Strive to make lobbying interesting, and even fun.** Innovative campaigns can re-energize public interest staff. They also are more likely to get the attention of decision-makers and the media.