



Tips on Communications for Advocacy

Source

What We've Learned: Lessons from a Communications Campaign For South Africa's Rural Poor (Atlantic Report)

Get informed about the policy background and political environment, and identify existing research around the issue.

Ask experienced advocates, partners and potential participants for opinions on campaign objectives and communications strategies. Determine whether existing research and literature provide a sufficient evidence base for the campaign.

When credible research does not exist, develop an evidence base with respected researchers, key allies and possibly unlikely bedfellows.

The beginning of a research process and communications campaign is a key opportunity to engage allies as well as adversaries inclined to dispute particular research findings. Social Surveys and Nkuzi, for example, asked representatives of the white farmers' unions and government land statisticians for advice on the survey design so that they would not later dispute the findings.

Gather current, reliable data.

Lobbying that is based on high quality, objective research, as in the case of the National Evictions Survey, is particularly powerful. Furthermore, the release of a research report is a great communications opportunity to generate new interest among a variety of stakeholders in the issue at hand. More than 200 people attended the launch of the National Evictions Survey.

Targeted, strategic communications are key to maximising the impact of a research report.

Identify a wide range of stakeholders, both within and outside of government, at the local, national and possibly international levels, and determine specific strategies to reach each stakeholder group.

For example, Nkuzi focused on influencing Parliament and government staff of relevant agencies. Targeting an overly inclusive range of audiences rather than specific groups will result in missed opportunities to garner attention to the research.

Consider all of the possible communications tactics for reaching various audiences.

Opportunities might include paid or earned story placements in broadcast, print or online media; speaking engagements; press conferences or other photo opportunities; digital communications like social networking; or paid advertising and marketing. Reach out to like-minded organisations for help in disseminating a research report or other publication. Consider strategies and tactics for communicating with hard-to-reach rural or low-literacy groups, such as community radio and non-written communications.

To communicate most effectively, test messages with key audiences.

Campaign planning should include a research process to test messages with various stakeholders. Feedback from focus groups, surveys or interviews, for example, will ensure use of the most effective language in communications with each stakeholder group. Furthermore, spokespersons should be carefully selected and well-trained for broadcast and print interviews and platform speaking.

Identify the decision makers in a policy reform effort and consider who and what influences them.

This process helps define the size of the challenge, circumscribes the scope of the policy fight, and narrows the types of tactics and strategies required. Furthermore, potential advocacy partners often can be found among the groups that influence the decision makers.

Make sure to set achievable and measurable communications and advocacy goals.

Ask experienced advocates how they have identified specific advocacy goals and worked toward them. Consider questions like: Is the timing for the advocacy effort right? Is the political and legislative environment conducive? Is the goal reachable? Think about how the campaign will measure the effectiveness of its communications, and factor measurement into the budget.

Identify consultants and project co-ordinators with necessary skills and expertise to help project partners develop constructive working relationships.

The project partners need to take substantial ownership of a community-based campaign and be engaged with the communications professionals in the design of the communications campaign from its inception in order to support it fully. A community based communications and advocacy campaign should not be orchestrated by funders, so a campaign co-ordinator should be identified to engage all of the project partners. For example, the Farm Life Project partners learned from their experience of not driving the initial campaign and, for that reason, selected Nkuzi, one of the key players, to co-ordinate the communications campaign in 2007–2008.

Engage partners across the coalition in planning and execution of the communications strategies.

Campaign leaders and communications consultants should involve coalition members in strategy development, where applicable, and share information across the coalition to ensure coordination

of messaging, events and other tactics.

Deliver a coherent, consistent message.

Develop a tested, unifying message to underscore the campaign, and co-ordinate with partner organisations to ensure that decision makers receive the message from multiple, strategic sources.

Identify a specific strategy for outreach to media to help obtain more in-depth, informed media coverage.

Along with convincing research data, anecdotes and photography give targeted audiences, like journalists, a nuanced understanding of the issue. In addition, anecdotes are appealing to journalists because they lend well to media reporting. Mr Schadeberg's book, *Voices from the Land*, incorporates compelling stories of farmworkers and their families alongside their portraits, giving a real "face" to the issue of farmworkers' rights.

Be prepared and allocate sufficient funding.

Communications campaigns are often ongoing, long-term initiatives. Advocacy efforts benefit from long-term funding and resources that enable the campaign to be flexible and opportunistic. In the case of the farmworkers communications effort, the campaign timeline was too short to keep the issue on the public agenda for the long term.

Plan for the worst-case scenario.

Identify inevitable adversaries of the campaign's policy position and their probable arguments, and prepare to respond quickly and effectively to attacks. It is important for an advocacy campaign to prepare for a range of scenarios so it does not lose time and resources if a crisis arises. For instance, due to forethought, the National Evictions Survey leaders involved farm owners and government land statisticians in the planning, which alleviated their need to discredit the findings.

Find support to amplify the campaign message.

Reach out to organisations and individuals with vested interest in the campaign's advocacy goal. Partners can strengthen a campaign by providing additional funding, spreading the campaign's message to new constituencies or demonstrating the breadth of support for policy reform.