

# Tips on Media and Communications Advocacy

*Effectively engaging the media is important to the success of your campaign. Below are some tips and strategies to consider:*

Newspapers, radio and television news, other forms of media can help you reach individuals who may be persuaded to support your goals but who are not already in your social networks. Having your issue covered by an impartial journalist also gives it more credibility.

**TIP:** *If a reporter can't reach someone on your team for comment quickly, they may move on. Make sure all of your communications with media include a cell phone number for one or more campaign spokespeople who will respond promptly to media requests.*

Media and communications advocacy is a key strategy to any successful campaign. To be effective, resources must be allocated and dedicated lead volunteers or staff should be engaged in media and communications strategies in the campaign. Media advocacy strategies can be utilized in your campaign in several ways, including:

## **1- Elevating the issue:**

Using media advocacy strategies is a way to generate awareness of the issue of youth in the juvenile justice system. Releasing a fact sheet, short paper or full report to the media can garner substantial media coverage as well as promote your policy agenda.

## **2- Showing the negative consequences:**

Sharing personal stories of youth who have been incarcerated and/or their families puts a face on the issue and shows the serious impact of this issue. While statistics and reports are helpful background, more often than not, reporters are interested in human interest stories. These stories can have a powerful impact on policymakers and the media, and if covered in a thoughtful and respectful way, can help you to show the consequences of incarcerating youth.

## **3- Engaging constituencies:**

Working with local media, including community newspapers and radio stations, can help you to get the word out about your campaign and generate interest from constituencies throughout your state. Radio stations are always looking for good content and if pitched to cover the issue, will sometimes host more than one show on the topic. Articles in local newspapers are a good way to enlist support from community members about your efforts. Since local papers have limited reporters but need good content, your press release can sometimes run 'as is' in the paper. Including an action photo is always a bonus. Social media such as Facebook and Twitter are also very helpful--journalists use it to find sources or story ideas, and to publicize stories they've written.

#### **4- Demonstrating the power of your campaign:**

There is nothing like the press to grab the attention of your local elected officials. It generates policymakers' attention and shows that your campaign is important enough for the press to cover it. Public hearings, direct actions, or other events where you have gathered a lot of people are especially good activities for attracting press attention. Do not assume policymakers have seen the press coverage, and it never hurts to send them an email note with web links to key press coverage.

#### **5- Holding policymakers accountable:**

*Not sure policymakers will stick to their pledge to support the issue? Get it on the evening news.*

*Think lawmakers might back off of implementing the bill you worked so hard to pass? Urge the governor to hold a bill signing ceremony and alert media.*

Be sure to bring your own camera and take a lot of photos and video clips. Save all the press clips and send thank you notes to your policymakers with the clips attached. This is good insurance against any backsliding that might occur post bill passage or during the next legislative session. (More information on these strategies are included in the later sections of this guide on implementation and documentation.)

#### **Additional ideas to help you get media coverage for your campaign:**

- ⇒ Start a Storybank with stories of directly impacted youth and their families
- ⇒ Put together a spokespersons bureau with directly impacted youth
- ⇒ Create a media action team to promote social media and provide rapid response to press requests and inquiries
- ⇒ Meet with reporters and editorial boards
- ⇒ Add questions to existing surveys and polls of other organizations or news outlets to gauge community support
- ⇒ Invite media to direct actions and to cover legislative and policy events and actions
- ⇒ Write and place letters-to-the-editor and opinion pieces (OpEds)

**TIP:** *If your campaign has members/allies who are willing to share their personal experiences with youth prisons, support those individuals as much as possible with media training, “strategic sharing” education, and the space to engage in self-care to avoid re-traumatization. Ensure that their sharing has maximum impact by linking it to a request related to your campaign goals or to common themes that will support your campaign (e.g., missed opportunities).*