Engaging the Media

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Why bother?

• **Media set the agenda**
  – Media have a powerful influence in what the public thinks *about*.
  – Even brief exposure to media coverage of a particular issue will increase public assessment of that issue’s importance. (Communications for Social Good: Susan Nall Bales & Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr.)

• **Media frame the debate**
  – The type of story that is told by the news media also powerfully affects the public’s understanding of social issues (Bales & Gilliam)
  – Individual vs policy solutions
Why bother?

• Many other reasons for media exposure:
  – Add a particular voice (and perspective) to the discussion
  – Name and Shame
  – Gain public support

Whatever the reason – be clear about your goal!
  • It will determine your approach
  • How else will you know if you’ve succeeded?
Thinking like a journalist

• The usual: What’s the story hook?
  – Timing
  – Significance
  – Proximity
  – Human interest
  – Unusual
  – Visual
Thinking like a journalist

• But remember also:

  – Have a particular audience in mind
  – Numbers can be intimidating
  – Time is a precious resource (‘churnalism’)
  – News needs events and people
  – Your story has to compete for space and attention (Upworthy example)
  – Good sources are crucial. So are good quotes
Common mistakes

• Thinking the media should cover it, because you think it’s important
• Not meeting the audience where they are
• Not investing the necessary time and resources
• Not building relationships
• Not following up, and giving up too soon
• Not preparing ready-to-use materials
• Overwhelming with information
• Believing the evidence speaks for itself
• Not linking to current issues or news
The facts are not enough

• Emotion trumps reason in human decision-making. (Antonio Demasio eg).
  – You have to make people care.

• Tell a story before zooming out
  – Trauma unit
  – Story of a single person more powerful than many – Malawi Example

• Make it visual
  – [https://visualisingadvocacy.org/](https://visualisingadvocacy.org/)
  – Use visual language

• Create your own events that are media-worthy (eg Billionaires for Bush)

• “It’s a Scandal” Scandal = Awful + Avoidable x Immoral profit (Chris Rose)
Controlling the message

• Language is important

  – Select appropriate metaphors (crime eg; credit-card vs casino)
  – Make numbers/quantity tangible
  – Speak in the singular
  – Profile the actors- the economy is not a self-created entity – people create conditions and can change them
Controlling the message

• Handling an interview
  • Prepare your talking points
  • Have some soundbites ready
  • You don’t have to answer the question!

• Bridging:
  • ‘Some say that, but what our research shows is...’
  • “That is an issue, but the important thing is...”
DEATH AND DYING IN THE EASTERN CAPE
An investigation into the collapse of a health system

+ "It was deep, sharp pain. I felt something come out of me. I stood up and searched in the darkness for a nurse. The nurses ordered me to walk around."

+ "Citizens report of dignity and death"

The story of Lindiswa Gxalala, a 31-year-old woman, who lost her baby when she was seven months pregnant, is a tough read.

Lindiswa was living in a flat in the Eastern Cape, and she was seven months pregnant at the time. She went into labour at night and her husband, who is a security guard, called an ambulance. The ambulance arrived, but the nurses were not there. The baby was born dead and Lindiswa was left alone in the hospital for seven hours. She was not given any pain relief and was left without food or drink. The nurses were not present and she was left to suffer in pain.

Lindiswa’s husband said that he had to call his mother to help him deliver the baby. He said that the nurses were not there to help and that he had to do it himself. He said that the baby was born with its head in the womb and that he had to cut it out with his hands.

The hospital was not able to provide Lindiswa with any pain relief or medical care. She was left to suffer in pain and was not given any food or drink. She was left in the hospital for seven hours and was not able to see her baby before it was taken away.

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So: what makes a good budget story?

• A single clear message
• Meets the audience where they are
• Tells a story
• Contains memorable visuals and/or quotes
• Concrete -- links decisions and actions (by people) to impacts (on people)
• Timely, relevant and fresh
• Highlights problems as well as solutions