My Voice Counts!

Campaigns for Youth's Reproductive and Sexual Health

Advocacy and Organizing Toolkit

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Advocates for Youth—Helping young people make safe and responsible decisions about sexual health

Advocates for Youth is dedicated to creating programs and advocating for policies that help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. Advocates provides information, training, and strategic assistance to youth-serving organizations, policy makers, youth activists, and the media in the United States and the developing world.

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Chapter 1. My Voice Counts! The Campaign for Youth's Right to Reproductive & Sexual Health Information & Services

What Is the My Voice Counts! Campaign?

My Voice Counts! is a national campaign, created by and for young people, demanding our right to sexual health information and services. We are working to secure:

- Improved access to emergency contraception—including access without a doctor's prescription;
- Comprehensive sex education in America's schools;
- Realistic global HIV prevention programs; and
- U.S. funding for international family planning.

The Campaign brings together youth working in the field of sexual health, creating a coordinated movement to fight at local, state, and federal levels. Through the Campaign, Advocates for Youth supports youth activists from all over the country and encourages organizations to sponsor youth and to participate in grassroots activities to bring youth's reproductive and sexual health information and services to the forefront of the nation's agenda.

Advocates Philosophy—Rights, Respect, Responsibility® (3Rs) What Does It Mean?

In Europe, I saw how kids are taught what we call the three Rs—rights, respect, and responsibility. Parents trust their children to make the right decisions. In America, teens are often told they're "too young" to deal with sex. Instead of avoiding the issue, I think we should help kids understand when they aren't ready to have sex, and, if they're going to do it, to do it safely. "Safer sex or no Sex" should be everybody's motto, worldwide.

Melissa Harris, former student reporter for Teen People

Advocates for Youth envisions a society that views sexuality as normal and healthy and that treats young people as a valuable resource. In such a society, communication and partnership within the family will be the norm, and communities (families, schools, religious institutions, and health care professionals) will fulfill their responsibilities by providing young people with accurate and complete sexual health information, the confidential health services youth need to protect their health and save their lives, and a secure stake in the future.

Advocates' vision is informed by lessons learned during annual study tours that explore how Germany, France, and the Netherlands achieved significant reductions in teen pregnancies, births, abortions, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In these countries, governments and society view accurate information and confidential sexual health services, not merely as needed by youth, but as their right. Addressing youth's right to information and services, in turn, depends upon society's accepting adolescents' sexual development as normal and healthy. The Dutch, Germans, and French spend far less time and effort than Americans in trying to *prevent* young people from having sex and more time and effort in *educating* and *empowering* young people to behave responsibly when they eventually decide to have sex. Educators, health care providers, and parents collaborate in providing accurate and complete sexual health information. Parents' most imperative message is, not that teens' sexual development is a problem, but instead that sexual intimacy should occur *only* when youth are ready for it and then should occur *only* within a caring, mutually respectful relationship.

Rights, Respect, Responsibility® (the 3Rs) are core values that guide the work of Advocates for Youth and animate its vision of such a society.

• **RIGHTS:** Youth have *rights* to accurate and complete sexual health information, confidential reproductive and sexual health services, and a secure stake in the future.

- **RESPECT:** Youth deserve *respect*. Today, young people are largely perceived as part of the problem. Valuing young people means they are part of the solution and participate in developing programs and policies that affect their wellbeing.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Society has the *responsibility* to provide young people with the tools they need to safeguard their sexual health, and young people have the responsibility to protect themselves from too early childbearing and from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

As part of the campaign to promote the 3Rs vision, Advocates has created a Youth Activist Network (http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/advocacy/yan.htm) of young people in the United States and developing countries, encouraging them to become leaders for improved reproductive and sexual health policies and services in their communities, states, and nations.

What Can Youth Activists Do?

As youth, you are the ideal spokespeople to raise concerns about adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues. You bring a unique voice to the debates around these issues. You know what your peers are worried about. You know what works with youth in your community, and what doesn't. You are also probably far more concerned about the well-being of youth around the world than are some U.S. policy makers.

The rates of teenage births, abortions, and STIs are significantly lower in countries where sexual health information is widely available, where young people are encouraged to use contraception, and where youth are valued. Young people have the right to sexual health information and services! You can educate your peers and speak out as an advocate for youth.

Learn more about the politics of adolescent reproductive and sexual health by visiting My Voice Counts! Campaign's Web site at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/myvoicecounts/. Specifically, here are some things you can do on the Campaign's Web site:

- Sign petitions demanding your right to reproductive and sexual health information and services.
- View Advocates' electronic public service announcements (ePSAs) and send them on to your friends so they can sign the petitions.
- Send e-mails to the President, Congress, and other politicians demanding your right to reproductive and sexual health information and services.
- Join up with other youth activists through the Youth Activist Network.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local or state newspaper.

Chapter 2. Educating Your Community

As a first step, get the support of as many people as possible in your community or school. Because the media has often covered the issue of teen pregnancy, many people are aware teen pregnancy rates in the United States. However, they may not have noticed that most media coverage of youth presents teens as "problems." Adults probably don't know what programs work best in teaching young people about sexual and reproductive health. They may not know what works best in reducing sexual risk-taking by youth or understand why the global "gag rule" undermines the well-being of women and their children around the world. Community forums and/or petition gathering are just two ways to educate your community about adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues and about the abilities and commitment of youth to improving young people's situation.

- A. Community Forums
- B. Petition Gathering

A. Community Forums

People can only support your efforts if they understand the issue, understand what needs to be changed and feel that they can make a difference. Community forums are excellent ways to educate parents, teachers, religious leaders, policy makers, and other youth about adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues. Community forums also offer an opportunity to solicit others' help in the next phases of your campaign.

What Are Community Forums?

- What is a community forum? A forum is an event where people who have experience in a particular subject share their knowledge, perspectives, and experience on an issue. It is a great resource for anyone who wants to learn more about an issue. It is also an excellent way to recruit activists. A community forum is an event that anyone can attend, where a panel of experts shares information, and where members of the audience can ask questions during a pre-set time (usually toward the end of the forum).
- Why hold a community forum? It is a great way to raise awareness in your community and to get people involved in an issue. It can provide an opportunity for activists to join forces to:
 - o Demand respect for youth's ability and willingness to make responsible choices about sex
 - o Advocate for the sexual health rights of youth
 - o Get local media to write about the issue.
- What is a forum's structure? A community forum should last about an hour (not longer than an hour-and-a-half)—long enough to educate your audience and short enough to keep their attention. Limit the forum to:
 - o Three presenters, each speaking for 12 to 15 minutes
 - One question and answer session, lasting no more than 20 minutes (after all the presenters have spoken)
 - o Wrap-up session, when you motivate attendees to act.

The forum should have a moderator to introduce the speakers, coordinate questions from the audience, and handle disruptions (if any). You should also have a time-keeper, to help keep the forum on time.

- Where do I hold a forum? Consider a location and a time that will draw a natural audience, such as a school or campus building, immediately after classes, or a church or synagogue, immediately after services. The setting you choose for the forum will partially depend on the audience you wish to reach. If your target audience is parents or other students, then school may be the best location. If your audience is the community at large, then a community center or town hall meeting space may be the right location. Each location will have different regulations for use of the space. Once you decide on the ideal setting, contact the appropriate authority for that location, and follow the procedure set out for using the space.
- What should I call the forum? Experts say it should always be something catchy and interesting to get people to attend. For example,

Sex, It's Not So Hard to Talk About!

or

Respect My Right to Act Responsibly!

What Are the Keys to a Successful Event?

• Research your subject! Learn as much as you can about the subject. Learn the facts as well as the misinformation that circulates about the issue. Set clear goals for what you want to achieve. When you ask someone to speak at the forum, she/he will probably ask about your interest in adolescent reproductive and sexual health as well as about the specific topic of the forum. The prospective speaker may also ask about your goals for the forum. If you have done your homework on the issue and have specific goals for the forum, a professional will know that you are serious and will be more likely to respond positively to your request.

- Make your arrangements early! Because there is a lot to do to make a community forum a success, you should start planning the event at least *six to eight weeks* in advance.
 - 1. Contact potential speakers early, so that they can arrange their schedules and plan their presentations. This also provides you with enough time to book alternative speakers, if your first choice doesn't work out.
 - 2. Find a location that is easily accessible and central to your target audience. Book the location well in advance and arrange for audio-visual equipment, as needed.
 - 3. Develop a plan to advertise the forum. Be sure that you notify the media. (See chapter five for a sample media advisory.) For a list of state and local papers in your area, visit: http://capwiz.com/advofy/dbg/media/.
- Select dynamic speakers! Good speakers will help ensure that the forum is effective in getting your message across. Seek out speakers who have done progressive work on the issue, are knowledgeable about the subject, have the power to change policy, and/or will inspire participants to take action. If you don't know who to ask, check with your local department of health, pediatricians, pharmacists association, women's groups, school nurses association, Planned Parenthood affiliate, and/or any other group that is supportive of your issue. Possibilities for speakers include:
 - o The president or policy director of one of the types of organizations listed above
 - o Leaders of youth organizations
 - o Speakers from HIV and AIDS service organizations, family planning associations, and/or sex education agencies
 - o Policy makers, including city or county council members, members of the board of education, and/or progressive legislators.

Don't forget to invite student groups and staff from these organizations to the forum. You want a lot of people there; so invite as many potential allies as you can identify.

- **Develop a detailed plan for the structure of the forum**. The more organized you are, the more likely that the forum will be successful and that many people will attend. Make a list of all the questions you must answer to make your forum a success. Some of these questions include the following:
 - 1. When, where and at what time will the forum occur?
 - 2. How long should it last?
 - 3. How many people will speak and who are they?
 - 4. Who will moderate?
 - 5. Who will sponsor the event?
 - 6. Who will keep time?
 - 7. How much time will you allocate for questions from the audience?
 - 8. How will you publicize the event?
 - 9. How many organizations will be invited and how will the invitations go out?
 - 10. What printed resources will be available for participants to take home?
 - 11. How will you notify media about the event?

Finally, once the details have been decided, be sure to send a letter to each presenter, confirming the details of the forum, the structure and content of their presentations, and the audio-visual resources that will be available to them.

- Advertise. Make sure that people know about your forum well in advance. Get all the forum sponsors to assist in getting the word out. Involve other young people and adult allies in the community in widely advertising the event. Submit ads to your local and school papers for events calendars; include the event in announcements at organizational meetings and homerooms; and/or hand out flyers at community events. Place flyers on the bulletin boards at community centers, religious institutions, and popular hangouts. Local newspapers and radio, and/or cable television stations may be willing to run public service announcements (PSAs) about the forum.
- **Be prepared to respond to opponents.** Expect your opponents to come to the forum and to be vocal. Before the forum, prepare a non-confrontational response expressing the importance of dialogue. It is a good idea to ask everyone who wants to ask a question during the question and answer session where he/she lives and what organization she/he represents. While everyone attending the forum has a right to speak, those attending have a right

to know exactly what organizations and/or position each speaker represents. To open discussion after an opposing question or comment, you could say, It sounds like there are some different views on this issue. It is important to hear different views, so who has a different viewpoint to express.

Do I Need a Checklist for the Big Day?

Yes! Your forum will run smoothly if all the important details are taken care of. Checklists can help you to ensure that nothing has been forgotten and that you have done every thing you can to make the event a success.

At least a week before the forum:

- Confirm that the room is still booked for the event and all necessary paperwork has been submitted.
- Confirm that all the presenters will attend and that you have all the information and equipment they will need.
- Confirm that all the audio-visual equipment, podiums, microphones, etc., have been ordered.
- **Finalize** any materials you plan to hand out on your issue, on the *My Voice Counts* Campaign, Advocates for Youth, and/or your campus club. Make sure you have enough copies for everyone you anticipate showing up.
- Copy or Print any petitions you wish to have at the event.

At least a day in advance, make sure that you have:

- **Enough chairs** for the number of people expected to attend as well as table, chairs, dais or podium, and props for the speakers.
- Sign-up sheets for participants so that you can contact them after the event.
- **Media sign-in sheets** for attending members of the press.
- **Organized handouts** that can be quickly distributed.
- **Petitions** on hand so youth can sign and support the issue right on the spot.

On the day of the event, make sure you:

- **Arrive early** to ensure that the room is properly set up.
- Assign volunteers to key locations to properly service the event.
- Place sign-in sheets and materials where people will enter the event.
- **Test all audio-visual equipment** to ensure that everything is in working order.

What Follow-Up Is Needed?

- Send thank you notes to the presenters for supporting the event and coming to speak!
- **Thank,** via e-mail if possible, the people who attended, reiterating what they can do to become or get more involved! Include a link to any petition, requesting that participants pass the petition on to friends and family.
- **Complete** an evaluation form for Advocates for Youth about how the event went. Don't forget to send the evaluation to Advocates!

B. Petition Gathering

An important part of achieving change is to show that a lot of people agree with you. Gathering signatures on a petition about your issue is a great way to educate and activate people. Petitions help to build a movement without a lot of effort for you or the people who are signing the petition. The larger the movement becomes and the more signatures you get, the more likely it is that the public, the media, and policy makers will pay attention to you and the issues of adolescent reproductive and sexual health.

What Is Petitioning?

Petitioning is collecting signatures on a form in support of an issue, a bill, or a candidate. In some cases, a candidate or an electoral initiative requires that those who circulate the petition and those who sign must be registered voters. However, a petition designed to build an activist movement for an issue—like comprehensive sex education, confidential health care, or non-prescription status for emergency contraception—does *not* need the signatures of registered voters. These petitions still have a significant impact because they demonstrate public support for the issue. Thus, young people who are most affected by adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues can sign a petition and have an impact on policy makers. Petitions usually include a position statement on the issue followed by space for people to sign and provide contact information. When people sign the petition, they are agreeing to the positions spelled out in the petition.

Who Can Petition?

Anyone—youth, senior citizens, registered voters, you, your mom, your dad, your little sister, or your dog! (Okay, not your dog.) For a campaign in support of adolescent reproductive and sexual health, youth activists encourage other **young people** to lead in petition gathering. Anyone under age 25 can sign the petition—regardless of whether she/he is registered to vote or even a citizen of the United States.

Why Should I Petition?

In the United States, petitioning has had a long history as a way for people to make their voices heard. It is an easy way for a large number of people to voice their concerns about an issue.

Where Should I Petition?

Anywhere! Pick your spot! Your answers to the following questions will help you pick a great spot.

- Is it a visible area? (Pick a spot with good visibility, where you can see and be seen!)
- Do a lot of people pass by this area? (Pick an area with lots of foot traffic!)
- Do you need permission (say from a school or store) or a permit to use a park or public space? (That's okay, just check it out in advance, and get permission or a permit, if you need it.)

Good places to petition include:

- Online (Advocates for Youth includes all *My Voice Counts!* petitions on its Web site at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/advocacy/myvoicecounts/forms.htm.)
- In or in front of the cafeteria during lunch hour(s)
- At the student union or outside class buildings
- In front of a grocery store
- In or outside of youth centers
- In front of any local hangout for youth
- Near a subway station or bus stop.

How Do I Go about Petitioning?

Petitioning online—You can easily collect petitions online by following these steps:

- 1. Go to http://www.advocatesforyouth.org and find the Advocates for Youth online petition.
- 2. Send e-mail, with a link to the petition (and the ePSA, if any) to all your friends, family, fellow students, and to Listservs you use. Include a personal message that encourages recipients to sign and forward the petition. Don't forget to sign the petition yourself.
- 3. Post a link to the petition prominently on your Web site's homepage and ask organizations and other Webmasters to post it.

Petitioning in person—Gather up a few friends, some clipboards, extra pens, and plenty of energy. (Bring tables and chairs if that is how you plan to stage the petitioning.) Now, set out for your chosen location. Either 1) plan to sit at your table in an area with plenty of foot traffic and hope people will stop or 2) get out the clipboards and move among people, asking them to sign. Either method works and is fun.

Remember, always smile and ask politely for signatures. Be sure you explain briefly why you are seeking petition signatures. Then, thank people for their time and for signing.

Note: If someone does not want to sign, that's okay. Do not embarrass anyone or argue in an attempt to get him/her to sign.

Here is an example of how to request someone's signature:

You:	Hi,	do	you	have	a	second	to	sign	a	petition	to	show	your	suppor	t for	young	peop	le's	right	to
					(your iss	ue)?	•												
The o	ther	pers	on: S	ure, w	hai	t's it for	?													
You:	Tod	ay,	youn	g peo	ple	all ove	er th	ne co	oun	try are	gat	hering	signa	itures to	sho	w	(0	Cong	ress,	the
President, School Board) that young people need and want									(your issue).											

Be prepared to provide additional information on the issue if asked. Some young people may be in a hurry and ask no more questions. Others may want to know more. You can go to www.advocatesforyouth.org for valuable online information about adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues.

Chapter 3. Making Your Voice Heard

Once you've educated your community or organized your coalition or student group, you're ready to take your message public. This step will help you fine-tune your message, develop your professionalism and enhance the visibility of your campaign. Working with the media will help draw attention to your issue and assist you in persuading policy makers to make necessary changes.

- A. Working with the Media
- B. Advocacy—the Art of Persuasion

A. Working with the Media

Media coverage is important because it carries your message to a much larger audience than you can reach by yourself. The media influences many people—the public, youth, parents, community leaders, educators, health care professionals, businesses, and elected officials at all levels of government. With some media savvy, you can draw positive attention to your issue and identify supporters of your cause.

The media can also lessen criticism by providing a forum where you and others can explain the complexities of adolescent reproductive and sexual health issues in a thoughtful and factual manner.

There are many parts to working with the media. This section addresses how to write a media advisory, give a good interview, create a good press kit, and write an op-ed/column or a feature article.

How Do I Give an Interview?

Being interviewed does not have to be scary. It's actually easy if you break down your efforts into some simple steps beforehand.

- **Talking points.** Always go into an event or interview with *three key messages or talking points* that you want to make. Then *make them*, no matter what questions are asked.
- **Bridge** to your key messages or talking points. If a question seems off topic, bring it back around to *what you want to say*. For example, you might bridge by saying, "That's an interesting question. However, I think the real issue is (insert your media message/talking point)..."
- **Be concise.** Give answers that are 10 to 15 seconds in length, and always speak in complete sentences. Speaking in complete, short sentences means reporters will not mistake your message or edit it into something else. So, it is less likely that your words will be taken out of context.
- **Do not lie.** If you do not know an answer to a question, *don't make something up*. It is okay to say, "I don't know" or "I'm not sure." Always offer to find the answer. Then be sure to get back to the reporter **before** his/her deadline.
- **Ask the deadline.** Be sure to ask the reporter's deadline for finishing the piece. Then make sure any follow-up information, statistics, quotes, are sent to the reporter *prior* to the deadline.
- **Prepare answers** for tough questions on your issue. Imagine what the tough questions might be and have ready responses.
- **Listen to the question carefully**. If you did not understand the question, ask the reporter to repeat the question or to clarify what he/she meant. Even when bridging, do not evade tough questions on your issue.

Should I Approach Print Media Differently from Electronic Media?

Yes and No! Short, concise answers are better with all types of media. However, there are differences in the ways television or radio and print media will cover the issue. You will have less time to make your points in a television or radio interview than with print. The "30-second sound bite" is the stuff of television and radio. While print reporters have more flexibility to provide background information on your issue and to include their own narrative in setting up the issue, your quotes should still be short, concise, and punchy.

How Do I Work with Print Media?

Besides being interviewed for a news or feature story, there are other ways to get your issue covered by a newspaper, including (from easiest to hardest): writing a *letter to the editor* about something that appeared in the newspaper; submitting an *op-ed* piece (a column giving your point of view on an issue); or getting the newspaper to publish an *editorial* in support of your issue. All of these are published solely at the discretion of the paper's editors.

Writing Letters to the Editor

The Letters to the Editor section is the most widely read section of a newspaper after the front page. The high readership offers you and your issue a cost-effective way to increase the visibility of your issue and to spread your message. A letter to the editor is usually written in *response* to a published article, an opinion piece, or current news. As a result, a letter to the editor must be *timely*.

Strategy

Be sure to remember the **five C's** when composing a letter to the editor. Always be:

- **Current**—Do not wait more than two days after the publication of the article to send in a letter to the editor. Better still, e-mail or fax the letter *the same day* the article appeared. (Call to find out which the newspaper prefers.)
- Concise—Make sure to keep your letter short (under 250 words) and to the point.
- **Controversial**—Question another's position but avoid personal attacks.
- **Contagious**—Send your letter to several newspapers, but be sure first to check their policies on multiple submissions. For example, if *The New York Times* agrees to publish your letter, make sure you haven't sent it to any other newspaper. Encourage others to write letters to the editor.
- Include **Contact information**. The newspaper will need verification that you are real or may need more information before it will publish your letter.

Writing an Op-Ed

"Op-ed" means "opposite the editorial page." An op-ed is an opinion piece, submitted by you to make the case for your issue. Since publishing an op-ed is solely at the discretion of the newspaper's editors, it is important to make your op-ed stand out. Here is a guide to writing an effective op-ed.

Strategy

- **Set the goal** of the op-ed. What are you trying to achieve? Do you wish to raise public awareness about the impact of your issue? Do you want to argue for or against a specific policy? Do you want to take your issue and put young person's slant on it?
- **Define the audience**. Are you trying to reach your neighbors; local, state or federal policy makers; public health officials; youth activists; or someone else?
- **Identify the appropriate newspaper**. Send your op-ed piece to the local or national paper most likely to reach your desired audience?
- **Determine the best time for placement**. Is an important policy vote on your issue coming up before a policy making body, such as the city council, school board, state legislature, or Congress? Is a report being released that you think deserves attention? These can be "hooks" for your op-ed piece. On the other hand, if a situation occurs that may divert attention from your op-ed issue, you may want to wait to place it. For example, in the weeks after September 11th, U.S. newspapers were highly unlikely to publish an op-ed focusing on adolescent sexual health.
- **Identify an original angle**. How can you draw attention to the issue or bring a new perspective to its coverage? Your thinking needs to be original, creative, fresh and groundbreaking. For example, a strong angle could be a very personal story by a youth in the community who has been directly affected by your issue.

Content

- The op-ed must be no longer than 700 to 750 words, typewritten and double-spaced. Remember, however, shorter is better!
- Sentences should be short and punchy (10 or 11 words maximum). Keep sentences active; avoid passive writing.
- Address only one main point in the op-ed.
- Avoid jargon, technical phrases, and acronyms.
- Be sure that all names are spelled correctly and all quotations are accurate.
- The following four pieces are essential parts of an effective op-ed:

- 1) The attention grabber—An op-ed should always start with an effective attention getter.
 - O Use humor. Use an anecdote or joke and relate it directly back to the issue you are discussing.
 - o **Talk about people**. Talk about yourself and other specific individuals to help the reader identify with you and subject.
 - o **Keep it current**. An op-ed *must* be about a current issue. Talk about something specific that happened recently and that underscores the issue.
 - o **Cite** an alarming statistic to grab the reader's attention.
- 2) The body of the op-ed, a.k.a. "the chain of evidence"—After the opener, move immediately to clearly state the issue and where you stand. This basically means writing a few paragraphs that offer arguments in support of the main point. The "body of evidence" may include:
 - Statistics: Easy to explain with clear, numerical analyses, but not too many; (don't drown the reader in statistics);
 - O **Quotes:** From authorities, especially public figures you might expect to oppose your position, but who actually support it (such as a conservative mayor of your town);
 - o **Agency positions:** The position of a known governing agency on the issue;
 - o **Analogies**: To connect ideas for readers who may not be familiar with the issue;
 - o Case studies: Make the issue concrete and memorable for people.
- 3) The conclusion—Briefly sum up your point.
- 4) *The goodbye zinger!*—This is a counterpart to the attention grabber and hammers home the message.

Submitting an op-ed

- Submit your op-ed via e-mail to larger newspapers or via fax to smaller papers. Call first to ascertain which the editors prefer.
- Follow up with a phone call to ensure the paper received the op-ed and to provide additional information, if needed by the editor or the newspaper.
- Be sure to include your school or other affiliation, day and evening phone numbers, and your e-mail address.

Getting a Newspaper Editorial

A newspaper editorial is a powerful piece because it represents an endorsement of your issue by the newspaper itself. Generating an editorial requires convincing the newspaper editorial board (usually composed of the newspaper's editors and the news/health reporters who cover your issue) of the validity of your position on an issue and/or giving the board a solid reason to support your issue.

- Learn the names of the editors and writers who cover your issue.
- **Schedule an editorial meeting** or a time to discuss the issue over the phone. Be polite. Introduce yourself and your organizational affiliation.
- **Explain your issue** simply, tell why it is newsworthy and why it is important that it be covered NOW.
- Plan your arguments (see talking points above) and practice them. Keep your points brief (one to two minutes) and be prepared to provide proof of any statistics and data you cite.
- Offer to send background information and set up a time for follow-up.
- Send the promised materials and follow up as planned. Offer assistance.
- **Keep your issue hot**. Often, newspapers have a lot of news to cover, so find new angles and bring attention to newsworthy events and people. Because you are a youth activist working in your community, your local paper could be especially interested in what you are doing.

How Do I Stage a Press Event?

The Press Briefing—A press briefing is organized to provide new information or a new perspective to reporters who specifically cover your issue. The briefing offers an opportunity to update these reporters on recent developments in an issue, with in-depth discussion and a lot of information. The press briefing usually offers a panel of expert speakers on the issue and a time for reporters to ask questions of the expert speakers. The briefing can also take place before a bigger event, such as a conference, a demonstration, or a major speech.

The Press Conference—A press conference is usually planned around a specific event, for example, a research report being released, a bill being heard in the state legislature, or a poll on adolescent reproductive and sexual health. For a press conference, it is usually advisable to request the presence of general assignment reporters (reporters who cover your issue from different perspectives—political, health, science, education) by sending out a press advisory, creating a press packet, and writing a press release prior to the event. A press conference follows the same format as a press briefing: a panel of speakers and a question and answer session. The press conference should be fast moving with the most important speakers first (while the reporters are still available), and with one-on-one press interviews after the briefing, arranged for the speakers to talk individually with reporters.

Considerations for a Press Event

- **Have a goal.** The goal should be more than simply trying to heighten visibility for your issue. The press event provides an opportunity to get a concise message to a targeted audience. Be strategic! For example, your goal might be to bring wide attention to an important, but little known, new study or to your groundbreaking, grassroots campaign.
- **Have a message.** Without a clear, concise message, it's hard for a news story to be remembered. Make sure to state your message quickly and memorably. Employing the use of a quick, easy to remember slogan or a catchy visual is a good way to have a hook. For example, "New study shows that condom availability *doesn't* promote sex, *does* protect students!"
- **Describe the problem.** The goal of a press event is, not just to complain about a situation, but also to identify a possible solution. Describe the problem; identify the obstacles; and then provide a solution or make a call to action. For example, the problem is an epidemic of sexually transmitted infections among local high school age youth, one obstacle is that the local school board disapproves of condoms being made available in schools, and the solution is for the school board to change its position on school condom availability.
- Plan. Invite the press. Send out a press advisory. Identify and call specific reporters that you think may be interested. Make it easy for them to attend—hold the event at a time when reporters are available and not on deadline (the time when reporters must have their stories finished and in to their editors). For example, morning is better for many print reporters, whose deadline for the next day's morning edition could be 4 or 5 pm. Reserve a room in advance and make sure that a podium, microphones, water, notepads, and pencils are available.

Choose speakers:

- o Have a limited number of speakers, ideally two or three. Having too many speakers can cause the event to lack strategic focus and dilute your message. Also, reporters on a deadline will not stay if there are too many speakers.
- o Get speakers who will represent different aspects of the issue while simultaneously supporting your position and proposed solutions. For example, you might ask the author of the new study on condom availability, a supportive public health official, and a young person to speak.
- Create a press packet. Items to include are:
 - o Outline of your activist campaign;
 - o Press release with punchy quotes from your speakers;
 - o Fact sheet and clippings about your issue;
 - o Background sheet with the proposed solutions;
 - O Copies of the most important charts and other visuals used in the event;
 - o Contact information for your spokesperson for the media to call.
- **Follow up.** Send e-mail or letters thanking reporters who write articles on the event. Clip and retain articles resulting from press events. These will help you gauge the effectiveness of your media work and document your success.
- Send copies of any resulting news articles to Advocates for Youth.

B. Advocacy—the Art of Persuasion

Once you've raised awareness, educated the public, and worked with the media, you're ready to take your message to policy makers. Because policy makers pay attention to issues that get a lot of media attention, it is a good idea to try to raise the visibility of your issue before setting meetings with the policy makers who affect your issue.

What Is Lobbying? It's the Art of Persuasion!

People vote to let their elected officials know how well they're doing. But there are other opportunities to communicate with decision makers, and many different methods for doing so. You can visit, call, or write your elected officials and you can present testimony. Advocacy can occur any time you interact with a policy maker.

Particularly with local policy makers, such as members of the city council or school board, you have many opportunities to share your opinions. For example, you can advocate when you meet a policy maker in the grocery store or at the post office. You can sign up to speak at a public hearing or write to elected officials about your viewpoint.

How Do I Go about Advocating?

Interacting with policy makers can be very exciting. Target your efforts. Survey the policy makers who will be involved in approving the policy or in funding and implementing the program of concern to you. Decide whom to approach and in what order. Develop objectives for each meeting. Start with firm supporters and then move on to those who may be moderately supportive or are undecided on the issue. For example, in regard to a bill pending in the state legislature that would broaden funding for state and local family planning services, begin with legislators on the committee that will first hear the bill and members of a friendly caucus, such as the women's caucus. In regard to school board policy about sex education curricula, start with the school board members who might support a more comprehensive approach.

- **Be gracious.** Always begin by thanking the policy maker for the opportunity to share your ideas and opinions. Elected officials who support adolescent reproductive and sexual health, in particular, receive a lot of negative attention from the opposition. They will greatly appreciate a sincere "thank you."
- **Be professional.** Be professional in both dress and manner. Don't say negative things about other policy makers or public figures.
- **Be focused.** Stick with *one issue* per call or letter. Talking about more than one topic will only confuse the message and dilute your point.
- **Do your homework.** As part of your preparation, research the policy maker's position on your issue. You can find this position through voting records, speeches, newspaper articles, debates, and from other organizations that work in related areas. Advocacy organizations, particularly those with political action committees (PACs), often track elected officials' votes and can provide guides to their voting record. Explore the policy maker's personal connection with the issue—does she/he have teenagers or pre-teens? For maximum effectiveness, frame your presentation within your knowledge of the elected official's constituency, views, background, and interests. People find different arguments compelling; use the most persuasive argument for *this* person at *this* time. It may help if you role-play what you will say at the meeting, and practice responding to possible comments or questions from the policy maker.
- Make a personal connection. No matter how insignificant you may feel the connection to be, if you have friends, relatives, and/or colleagues in common, *let the policy maker know!* Especially let the policy maker know if you are a constituent! The decision making process can be very informal and, although a personal connection will make no difference to your presentation, it may make a big difference in how effective you are.
- Consider yourself an information source. Policy makers have limited time and staff to devote to any one issue. They can't be as informed on all the issues—or on the ones that concern you—as they would like to be. You can fill the information gap. Encourage the policy maker's questions about the program or issue by engaging in discussion and offering more information.
- **Tell the truth.** There is no faster way to lose credibility than to give false or misleading information to a policy maker.
- Know who else is on your side. It is helpful for a policy maker to know what other groups, individuals, state agencies, and/or legislators are working with you on an issue. Providing this information also illustrates that your

group represents many voters. Bringing coalition members and other youth in on lobbying efforts is important. So, keep in touch with your allies, coordinate advocacy efforts, and share relevant information.

- **Know the opposition.** Anticipate who may be in the opposition—both individuals and organizations. Tell the policy maker what the opposition's arguments are likely to be and provide clarification and rebuttal. Elected officials appreciate being able to anticipate criticism, so this will make a real difference in your effectiveness.
- **Don't be afraid to admit you don't know something.** If a policy maker wants information you don't have, or asks something you don't know, say you don't know. Then, offer to get the information, and **DO IT!** Be sure to get back to him/her promptly with the information you promised.
- **Be specific in what you ask for.** If you want a vote, information, answers to a question, a signature on a petition—whatever it is—make sure you say so directly. Make sure you get a response—yes or no—to your request.
- **Follow up.** Find out if the policy maker did what he/she promised. Send a letter, restating your position and thanking her/him for supportive action taken or asking for an explanation for an unsupportive action.
- **Stay informed.** The status of policy decisions and/or legislation changes quickly and often. Amendments or other committee actions can change a policy radically and with little publicity. The sponsor of the policy or legislation can identify where it is and what its current language is.
- **Don't burn any bridges.** It is easy to get emotional over strongly felt issues. But, it is far more important to maintain a good relationship with the policy maker so that you can return to her/him on this or another issue. Don't get into a heated argument with a policy maker. Never threaten elected officials! Remember that your strongest opponent on one issue may be your greatest supporter on another!
- Remember, you are the boss. The government works for you. Tax dollars pay elected officials' salaries, the paper they write on, and the phones they use. You are the employer; the policy maker is the employee. So, be courteous, but don't feel intimidated.

How Do I Communicate with Policy Makers, by Letter, Fax, or E-Mail?

- Identify policy makers you want to target. Mail, fax, or e-mail a letter to your own representatives, to all members of the committee dealing with your issue, or to every member of the policy making body. You can access a database of elected national and state officials by going to Advocates for Youth's Take Action Center (http://capwiz.com/advofy/home/). Still, if you send e-mail to policy makers, just remember that a few policy makers still pay less attention to e-mail than to letters sent through the mail. On the other hand, mail is extra slow in getting to many policy makers these days, because of safeguards against terrorism. Whether you send e-mail, fax, or a written letter, it is *very* important to include your contact information, including home address and phone number, so that the elected official knows that you are a constituent.
- Always ask for some action. If you are writing about a specific bill remember to ask the elected official to either *support* or *oppose* the legislation. Your letter will be more effective if it concentrates on a specific issue or a particular bill. Refer to the issue at the beginning of the letter, or, if referring to a bill, cite the sponsor, bill title, and bill number. Include the bill's status, what committee has it, and when a public hearing was held or will be held on it. Following are samples of how to start your letter:

Dear Ms. Jones

I am writing to address the school board's policy on sex education in the public schools of this District.

Dear Representative Jones:

I am writing to urge your support of H.R. 2931, currently before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.

- **Be brief and succinct.** A succinct one-page letter will have far more impact than a letter that goes on and on for ten pages. Outline your main point in the first paragraph and discuss only one issue. State clearly how you want the elected official to vote. For background, you might also include a newspaper clipping or single fact sheet presenting the issue in greater depth. Remember, your letter should speak briefly to five W's: *who* you are, *what* you are writing about, *why* it's important, *what* you want the policy maker to do, and *where* you can be reached.
- Make it personal. Elected officials and their staff are more likely to pay attention to and remember letters that include real life experiences. Explain why the issue is important to you and how the policy, legislation, or decision will affect you and others in your area. *Briefly* describe a personal experience that illustrates your point. Mass campaigns with stock messages impress policy makers less than heart-felt letters from constituents.

- Identify your relationship with the policy maker. If you are a constituent and/or have another connection with him/her, say so at the beginning of the letter. Include your name and address. This enables the policy maker to respond to your letter, indicates your voting district, and gives an extra incentive for the elected official to pay attention to you.
- Ensure that the policy maker receives your letter. When the policy making body is in session, send your letter to the offices of the state legislative body, county council, etc. Out of session, use the address of the policy maker's home or personal office. For e-mail, check whether the policy maker uses different e-mail addresses at different times or for different purposes.
- **Follow up.** Make a quick call to confirm receipt of the letter. You can simply say to the receptionist: "I'm calling Ms. Jones to make sure she received my letter about the school board's sex education policy." Leave your name and phone number. Continue to call or write until your receive acknowledgment of your letter.
- Send a final reminder about the policy decision that concerns you. Find out when the decision will be made and, just before the vote, send a postcard or e-mail or leave voice mail, reminding the policy maker of the position you support. As before, include the bill number and title, if appropriate. This will let the policy maker know that you continue to follow this issue and that her/his vote is still important to you.
- Thank the policy maker if he/she voted with your position. Politely let him/her know that you are disappointed, if the vote was contrary to your position.

How about Face-to-Face Visits with Policy Makers?

- Schedule a meeting. Call the policy maker's office and schedule a meeting. Make the appointment far enough in advance to allow you time to prepare. Confirm the meeting and invite other people also working on this issue to also participate in the meeting. Keep a record of who attended, what information was shared, and any actions promised by the policy maker an/or promised to the policy maker.
- **Be flexible.** Expect interruptions and changes in schedule or staff availability. If you can't meet with a policy maker, try to meet with the appropriate staff member or reschedule for another time.
- **Be prompt.** Don't be late, as it sets a bad tone for the meeting before it has even started. If you are running late, call ahead and let the policy maker's office know that you will be late. If you will be late, ask if the appointment should be rescheduled.
- **Be prepared.** Make the most of your visit. Plan your presentation in advance and divide up roles, including a note-taker, among those planning to attend. Plan a five-minute presentation (10 minutes at the most) and expect to spend no more than 15 minutes with the policy maker. Make your important points in a clear and succinct manner. Briefly note personal relationships and whether any of you are the policy maker's constituents.
- Leave materials behind. Develop a slender packet of information to leave with the policy maker. The packet should include a short (one- to two-page) summary regarding the organization you represent, the issue you raise, and your request for action. The packet can also include background information about the issue and one or two press clippings, such as an editorial supporting your position. Do not leave so much information that no one wants to look through it.
- **Follow up** by sending a note thanking the policy maker for her/his time. Include information that he/she can use to support the position you want, or which may move the policy maker to support your position.
- **Take advantage of opportunities.** A meeting with policy makers can take place anywhere—in the state house hallways, at an unrelated event, or in the local grocery store. Take advantage of unexpected opportunities to speak with policy makers.

How about Communicating with Policy Makers by Telephone?

- **Identify yourself**, giving your name and address. If you are a constituent, say so.
- **Identify the issue** of concern to you. When referring to a bill, use its number and its title.
- State your position and how you would like the policy maker to vote.
- Ask for the policy maker's position on the bill or issue. If supportive, ask for a commitment to vote for your position. If opposing or undecided, thank the policy maker for the information, but don't argue. Ask what information would help her/him to become a proponent. If the policy maker is unavailable, leave a *detailed* message with a staff member. The staff member may also be able to describe the policy maker's position on the issue.
- **Follow up** by sending a note thanking the policy maker for his/her time. Include information that he/she can use to support the position you want, or which may move the policy maker to support your position.

What If I Want to Provide Testimony?

When committees and subcommittees hear views from constituents on a certain topic, it is called "testimony." Arrangements for presenting testimony vary by the policy making body. In most areas, you can speak at meetings or make a presentation to the city council or school board. Call the offices of your representative to find out how to schedule a presentation. If you want to present testimony before the state legislature, the state legislative research office will be able to tell you the procedure to be followed. Usually, you can arrange to present testimony by calling the bill's sponsor, the chair of the committee considering the bill, or your legislator. Once your testimony or presentation is scheduled:

- **Draft a five-minute speech**. Begin by thanking the committee members for allowing you to present your views. Make the testimony interesting, personal, and compelling.
- **Include information** about what you believe the policy's effects would be, as well as a few compelling statistics about the situation the policy will address.
- **Print your testimony.** Include your name, address, organizational affiliation, and the policy topic or bill number at the top of the first page. Ask staff how many copies of your testimony to bring to the hearing.
- Attach easy-to-read background information—such as a newspaper article or fact sheet.
- **Practice your speech** until you are very comfortable with it. Practice will also help lessen your nervousness. Time your delivery to ensure that you don't go over five minutes.
- Expect questions from the policy makers, particularly from those opposing your viewpoint, and come prepared to address their concerns.

How Do I Deal with Agreement or Opposition from Policy Makers?

What if the policy maker STRONGLY AGREES with my position?

- Thank the policy maker.
- Ask the policy maker to take a leadership role on the issue in the policy making body, the media, and/or the community. It is appropriate to ask the policy maker to:
 - o Write an article for a newsletter
 - o Sign a petition or letter of support
 - o Permit public use of the his/her name
 - o Sponsor a bill
 - o Offer amendments to policy or legislation
 - Make speeches at public forums
 - o Agree to vote for, or against, a resolution.
- Ask the policy maker's advice about others to talk with, what arguments make the best case for the issue, and what media strategy will be most effective in gathering support for the policy.
- Ask what information or constituency would be helpful in swaying additional policy makers to your position. Then work to produce these materials or advocates.
- Ask the policy maker to "lobby" undecided colleagues. Provide a list of these undecided colleagues.
- Thank the policy maker again.

What if the policy maker AGREES with my position?

- Thank the policy maker.
- Assure the policy maker of your continued interest in the issue and your continued support for the position he/she has taken.
- Ask if the policy maker would be willing to help in any way beyond voting. If yes, refer to the tips above under STRONGLY AGREES.
- Thank the policy maker again.

What if the policy maker is UNDECIDED or NONCOMMITTAL?

- Inform the policy maker of your interest in the issue or legislation.
- Present the case as clearly and concisely as possible. If possible, ask constituents, including teens, to make the presentation.
- Ask about the policy maker's viewpoint (to learn whether his/her position arises from personal or political factors, a lack of information, misinformation, or a combination of these). Adjust your strategy accordingly.
- Ask if there are specific groups or individuals from whom the policy maker would like to hear on this issue.
- Offer to provide information that will help inform the policy maker about the issue.
- Follow up by providing the information you promised and/or that addresses the policy maker's reservations.
- Once the policy maker has indicated a position, express thanks for her/his support or disappointment for non-support.
- Keep in touch to nurture the relationship.

What if the policy maker is OPPOSED to my position?

- Thank the policy maker for the opportunity to present your views.
- Determine how strong the policy maker's position is, and upon what it is based. If the opposition is not vehement, it may be worth trying to change his/her position.
- If the policy maker appears movable, present information that addresses his/her concerns. Make sure that the policy maker hears from constituents who support your position. Strategize and present the case most likely to resonate with this particular policy maker.
- Stay in touch to nurture the relationship with the policy maker.

What if the policy maker is STRONGLY OPPOSED to my position?

If the policy maker is strongly opposed to your position, ask him/her not to lobby colleagues on the issue. If you expect a close vote and cannot win without his/her cooperation, ask him/her to "walk" (be absent) when the vote occurs.

• If the policy maker is strongly opposed, write and express your disappointment in the position and/or vote taken. Don't waste your time and energy trying to move this particular policy maker. But be polite. The policy maker might be your ally on another issue, at another time.

Chapter 4. Additional Considerations & Tips

Create a broad based coalition of vocal supporters. Extensive support and participation by members of the community clearly indicates the popularity and/or importance of the issue. Support one another when times are rough and remind everyone about the importance of ensuring the reproductive and sexual health of youth!

Be prepared for opposition. Acknowledge, in advance, that there will be objections to your efforts, and watch for these objections. Know both *who* is in the opposition and *what objections* they will raise. Read opposition materials; study the newspapers; watch or listen to talk shows. Learn about area organizations that will oppose your efforts. Check the Web sites of opposition organizations to see what materials they are disseminating on the issue. The opposition may misrepresent the goals and effects of progressive organizations, programs, and campaigns.

Explain the issue to the public. Many successes of the far right come from twisting the meaning of educational, public health, and public policy terms that are unfamiliar to the general public. Do not use far right descriptions when explaining why the proposed program or solution will help families, protect children, and address existing problems in the community. Use accurate, descriptive language. For example, the far right often talks about "condom distribution" or "contraceptive distribution." These terms are inaccurate since these programs do not *distribute* contraception willy-nilly to everybody, but rather make it *available* to those who request it. Hence, "condom availability" or "contraceptive availability" is more accurate and descriptive for such programs.

Defend your position. Prepare to answer criticisms with data, statistics, anecdotes, and examples. Ignoring opposition statements gives them a credibility they do not deserve and allows distortions to stand. Check opposition statements for truthfulness and refute inaccuracies, distortions, and misrepresentations. When terms are unclear ask for an explanation; when terms have been manipulated into a different meaning, demand an explanation. You can respond to opponents by writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed, by speaking out at meetings, calling in to radio talk shows, and/or offering your position as a follow-up interview to papers, television, or radio stations covering the issue.

Encourage open and civilized debate. Open discussion is essential to the democratic process and is the only way to address concerns of the public and the objections of the opposition. Investigate and participate in the forums through which communities, schools, local governments, and other public organizations address issues. Ensure that any public meetings you hold adhere to established rules for order. Ask members of the press to sign in and to show their credentials. Require speakers to sign up in advance and to give their name and address and other pertinent information. For example, if the meeting is on school based sex education, it is important for all attending to know whether each speaker attends the public school in question or has children in the school system. Set time limits and select a moderator who will control the forum, stopping personal attacks or diatribes. Some communities hold hearings for specific groups, such as parents, health care professionals, teachers, or students. Attending such hearings can be time-consuming. However, you can learn and share much in open discussion in such forums.

Don't be afraid of threats of lawsuits. Urge policy makers not to be intimidated when faced with demands that programs be abandoned or issues ignored. Threats of lawsuits are common when communities consider progressive programs, but few such threats are carried out successfully. You can hold a community meeting to generate open discussion, demonstrate broad based support, and respond to concerns raised by the opposition. If you receive personal threats, notify the appropriate authorities.

Follow the debate. Identify the different news outlets in your area and watch for coverage of your issue. Participate in the debate by contacting these outlets with news, objections, and clarifications. Sometimes opposition groups spread misinformation about programs and policies through leafleting and flyers. If this happens, respond with correct information through the media and community and religious groups.

Take the lead. Provide accurate information. Offer a framework for discussion, make the facts known, and give all in the community a chance to get involved. Set the tone of the debate by taking the lead.

How Do I Build a Coalition?

Reproductive and sexual health programs and policies affect nearly all people. Partnering with organizations that support you is a valuable way to generate and demonstrate wide support. (See the Invitational Letter under Chapter VI, Resources, for an example of a method for making contact with organizations.) *My Voice Counts* is a great way to mobilize people who are or may be interested in sexual health issues, such as non-prescription status for emergency contraception; comprehensive sex education; increased funding for international family planning; and support for effective HIV prevention and treatment strategies and programs. Here are some tips for getting people involved.

Identify like-minded groups or organizations. Make a list of potentially supportive groups or organizations. These could include:

- Peer health educators
- Teachers' unions
- Gay/straight alliances
- Student and adult alliances for people of color
- College clubs and organizations, including sororities and fraternities
- HIV and AIDS treatment, prevention, and support groups
- Progressive political groups
- Civil liberties and human rights organizations
- Medical and public health organizations.

Approach groups with clear objectives and with specific requests. Speak with the leader of the group about your issue. Explain what you are trying to accomplish and talk about why the issue is relevant to the other organization. Ask to attend a meeting. Offer a clear idea of how the group can participate in your issue: by collecting petition signatures; working cooperatively to lobby particular legislators or committees; writing an op-ed; participating in strategic planning around the issue; holding a community forum; or contributing monetarily. The clearer you are in your request, the more willing the other organization may be to help.

Be flexible. Be open to changing your campaign to reflect the needs of the partner organization. For example, the partner may have a point that is relevant to its community or supporters that you haven't considered but that will make the overall campaign stronger, more diverse, or more powerful. Be open to changing aspects of the campaign to incorporate this point. After all, the purpose is to reach the broadest audience possible, and you want to make sure your action reflects the diversity of the people you are trying to reach!

At the same time, be wary of a potential partnership that would undermine the very issue you care so much about. For example, an organization that opposes teaching young people about contraception might be very strong in your community. To partner with this organization would make your coalition far stronger, but it would also *destroy* the very reason you had for building a coalition in the first place.

Be open to ongoing coalition work. Another organization may be much more willing to help you if you and your organization will also help out with projects important to the other organization. Be open and offer to help. For example, you might advertise the other organization's events on your Web site, and help with events that meet your common goals. Everyone will profit and the coalition will be much more effective than when each agency works only on its own projects!

How Do I Stage a Rally or Picketing Event?

There is no reason to be afraid of making a little noise; everyone who is anyone in American history has done so. Political action, when done legally and without violence, can be fun, creative, and effective. It also gives people a sense of power they haven't known they had.

Considerations

- **Know the law**. While the right to assemble peaceably is protected under the Constitution of the United States, each state and local community has specific laws regarding organized assemblies in public spaces. Contact your local police to determine what these laws are. Then follow them. This normally involves, at a minimum, obtaining a permit that alerts the local police about your event and that sets the limits you must observe—such as limitations on noise, littering, etc.
- Remember that non-violence works. As many social movements have shown, non-violence is safe and highly effective. Mahatma Gandhi put Thoreau's theories of nonviolent civil disobedience to incredibly effective use in the 1940s, orchestrating an immense, nonviolent movement that earned India its freedom from British rule. In the 1960s, the NAACP and its allies used nonviolent methods to bring down segregation in the United States and to change for the better the future of all Americans.
- **Identify a target**. The target is the person who can fix the problem—someone who has the power to make the changes you seek. Your target might be a member of Congress, state legislative committee, principal or mayor, or an entire school board.
- **Identify a location.** The location might be the local or "district" office of your representative or senator in Congress or the state legislature, the school board's office, your school or the principal's office, or the state capitol. Ask yourself—what location is associated with the target? Also consider where people will be willing to come, what will look good in front of television cameras, and what will enhance the appearance of your group. For example, a small group of demonstrators appears much more impressive in a small space than in a large, open area.
- Analyze your target. It is important to determine who can influence the chosen target. Maybe she/he doesn't care about the opinions of young people, but does care about those of parents, teachers, or voters. Or perhaps, he/she dislikes bad press.
- **Build a coalition.** You need a core group of at least two to three others who will work with you. It is difficult to organize a protest, rally, or direct action all by yourself and even more difficult to get people to attend. When more people are involved in planning the action, the action will be better and more will attend.

The rally—At a rally, people gather to express their outrage at a problem and their support of a solution. It is important to keep the target in mind when picking the location for a rally—the location must show that you want the target to hear the message. For example, if you are holding a rally about the school board's refusal to allow condom availability in the school health center, it is important to have the rally at the school board's offices or at a meeting of the school board.

- You will need a permit for a rally held in any public space. For information on how to get a permit to hold a rally, contact your local police. If you want to hold a rally on school grounds, talk to your school principal and/or school superintendent for information about a permit. The permit will also place limits, such as noise and littering limits, on your rally. Obey all the rules that are set out for you.
- Identify a speaker and an emcee as well as someone to work with the press. The speaker should be someone who can communicate excitement to those at the rally and to anyone who might be watching. The emcee introduces the speaker or speakers and gets people to chanting. Speakers might include a peer educator, someone who's been harmed by abstinence-only education, a teacher, or an adult ally from a family planning clinic. Have no more than three speakers.
- Make signs that convey a clear message! For example,

SCHOOL BOARD LEAVES STUDENTS IN DARK! or INFORMATION + SERVICES = HEALTHY YOUNG PEOPLE or IGNORANCE IS NOT POWER! or FAMILY PLANNING SAVES LIVES!

You can undoubtedly think of better ones. Individual signs can carry different statements (but not more than three statements). Just make sure that all the signs convey the point of the rally.

• Develop chants! Have chants that get the message across and that are fun for people to say. The emcee or speakers can introduce the chants. There are many Web sites that list chants used for rallies of various kinds. Feel free to do some research.

Picketing—Picketing is an event for locations where you can't legally hold a rally, but still want to show up and let the target know what you think. Picketing has similarities to a rally and is usually smaller.

• Make signs that convey a clear message!

SCHOOL BOARD LEAVES STUDENTS IN DARK! or INFORMATION + SERVICES = HEALTHY YOUNG PEOPLE or IGNORANCE IS NOT POWER! or FAMILY PLANNING SAVES LIVES!

You can undoubtedly think of better ones. Individual signs can carry different statements (but not more than three statements). Just make sure that all the signs convey the point of the picketing.

- Check with your local police to see if your need a permit for picketing. If you need a permit, get it.
- Develop chants! Have chants that get the message across and that are fun for people to say. The leader can introduce the chants.
- Have props or visuals! Eye-catching props, like a giant condom, can make the picketing more interesting to the press or to people who walk by.
- Bring a bullhorn. Local laws govern amplification at protests, but it is usually okay to use a bullhorn to make your voice a little louder. Check with local police prior to your picketing event, to see if use of bullhorn is permitted. Then, you can use the bullhorn for short speeches, to energize people, or to keep a chant going.
- Be aware that picketing can be boring if it is the only thing you do. Remember, a major component of a successful protest is making participants feel like they are doing something worthwhile as well as exciting and fun!

Follow up—Evaluate to see if your protest was effective. Go back to your original goals—did your protest empower the people involved in it? Did it spread public awareness of your issue? Did it change a decision maker's mind? Don't forget to share the evaluation with Advocates for Youth!

Additional Resources

- Sample Media Advisory
- Sample Invitational Letter
- Online Resources
- Contacting Advocates for Youth

Sample Media Advisory

Media advisories should never be longer than one page. The best way to send the advisory is by fax. You will need to follow-up with the reporter closer to the event to confirm their attendance or to make a last-minute pitch.



Your logo goes here. Or, put the advisory on organization letterhead.

Rights, Respect, Responsibility, 9

Send the advisory 3 to 5 days in advance.

Thursday, February 20, 2003

The media have varying hours and deadlines. Include a number that they can reach at all times, such as a cell phone.

Contact:

Jane Doe 202-555-5729

Media advisories can be addressed to a specific person or to a beat, such as "Health Reporters" or "News Editors."

TO: All young people interested in savvy media skills

MEDIA ADVISORY

MEDIA ADVISORY

MEDIA ADVISORY

Answer the question: WHY should I cover your event?

This Is How to Write a Media Advisory

The title should be written like a news headline. Make it clear, catchy, and concise.

A media advisory is designed to catch the media's attention to convince them to attend an event for more information.

WHO:

Young Person, 16

This is where you can really emphasize the newsworthiness of your event. The fact that you are young and making a difference is unique, and the media love the unique. Include pertinent details.

WHAT:

A step-by-step guide to writing a media advisory.

A demonstration will be available for TV cameras.

WHERE:

Your School

Location

Your City, State

Give a brief description of the event. Include facts about whether there will be speakers, a presentation, visuals, etc.

WHEN:

Tuesday, February 25, 2003

For more information or to schedule an interview with Young Person, please contact Jane Doe at 202-555-5729.

If your event requires a reporter to RSVP, state so here. But, be aware that most media will be reluctant to commit to anything in case something "more important" suddenly happens.

Press materials usually use -30-; -end-; or ### to signify the end of the document.

My Voice Counts! Sex Education Campaign—End Censorship in America's Schools



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Dear	•
Dear	

I am writing to you about a groundbreaking, youth-led campaign to fight for comprehensive sex education in schools across the nation. As our state's organizer for the campaign, I invite you to join me in this exciting effort to improve sex education in this state.

Each and every day, some 10,000 U.S. youth acquire a sexually transmitted infection, 2,400 get pregnant, and 55 contract HIV. In fact compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and unintended pregnancies among youth. Yet, our government's response has been to fund unproven abstinence-only-until-marriage programs—programs that censor information about the health benefits of contraception and condoms. Since 1996, more than *half a billion* dollars has been allocated to deny young people vital information that could protect their health and save their lives.

The Campaign

To counter federal policies censoring sex education, youth activists across the country have joined Advocates for Youth in launching a campaign to put honest sex education back in America's schools and to make young people's voices heard in the national debate on sex education. The campaign will begin by gathering signatures on a petition supporting comprehensive sex education. Throughout the year, youth and concerned adult allies will spark community conversations on this issue, using community forums, letters to the editor, rallies, and protests—and culminating in October with a national advocacy day.

Petition Gathering

In fall 2002, Advocates for Youth and Rock the Vote began collecting youth's signatures on a petition urging Congress and the Administration to support honest sex education. With 25,000 signatures gathered already, our goal is to get at least 50,000 signatures by March 25th through working with young people and adult allies to encourage petitioning. (http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/specificaddresshere.htm)

Community Conversations

Throughout the rest of the year, community events will facilitate community-wide conversations on sex education. We may hold community and/or campus forums to educate people about the importance of comprehensive sex education, with forums' format varying to meet the needs and concerns of each community. We will also use other strategies, such as letters to the editor, rallies, and press briefings. We need your input to plan and carry out successful forums and other efforts in your community and its schools.

Advocacy Day

All of these activities will lead up to a national advocacy day. In the fall, youth activists will meet with their local school board members, state legislators, and/or members of Congress to advocate for comprehensive sex education. On Capitol Hill, activists will present the collected petitions to the Republican and Democratic leadership.

As the organizer for our state, I urge you to join me in bringing this vital issue to the front of our residents' consciousness. Our first priority is doubling the number of petition signatures by March 25th. We need your help. Please contact me about joining this important campaign and join our listsery to stay connected with campaign planning—http://groups.yahoo.com/group/youthactivistnetwork/.

Sincerely,

Your Name Your Contact information

How to get petition signatures:

- 1. If you are under 25, make sure YOU have signed the petition and seen the ePSA at: http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/specificaddresshere1.htm
- 2. Send E-mail with a link to the petition to all your e-mail addresses and list servs. Include a personal message encouraging recipients to forward the link to others.
- 3. Post a link to the petition prominently on your Web site's homepage. For campaign banners and buttons, please visit http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/specificaddresshere2.htm
- 4. Between March 11th and 25th, conduct a petition drive at public places, such as schools, youth centers, and sporting events, to get signatures from youth under age 25. Download a copy of the petition at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/specificaddresshere3.htm or contact me for copies.

Advocates for Youth is an international, nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring that young people have access to accurate sex education, youth-friendly sexual health services, and a secure stake in the future.

2000 M Street NW, Suite 750, Washington, DC 20036 202-419-3420 questions@advocatesforyouth.org http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/

demanding young people's right to sexual health information and services

http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/myvoicecounts/

Online Resources

- The My Voice Counts! Campaign Web site is a great source for more information on advocacy and activism. Find out more about the Campaign at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/myvoicecounts/.
- Advocates for Youth's Take Action Center provides information on legislation and allows you to contact your legislators and your local media directly via the Web at http://capwiz.com/advofy/.
- A complete listing of online publications from Advocates for Youth can be found at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/freepubs.htm.
- Connect with the Youth Activist Network at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/advocacy/yan.htm.
- Fill out and submit My Voice Counts! Campaign petitions and other online forms at http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/youth/advocacy/myvoicecounts/forms.htm.

Contacting Advocates for Youth

Contact Advocates for Youth's staff and activists with all your questions, comments, evaluation forms, and requests for materials via the Web at http://www.advocatesforyouth/youth/advocacy/myvoicecounts/contact.htm or at:

Advocates for Youth My Voice Counts! Campaign 2000 M Street NW, Suite 750 Washington DC, 20036 United States of America www.advocatesforyouth.org

Phone: 202.419.3420 Fax: 202.419.1448