

## CREATING CHANGE BY

**Fostering Public Awareness**

**T**True social change requires altering the way people view social problems and solutions (Bales & Gilliam 2004). For foundations and corporate giving programs with social change missions, informing and educating the public is essential. Grantmakers working to build public awareness and response face a number of strategic choices, including what type of social change they are attempting to make, who they are trying to reach, and which approach would be most effective.

Generally, a funder's public awareness goals can be divided into one of two categories: behavior change or policy change. A behavior change goal might involve motivating seniors to sign up for a card that provides discounts on prescription drugs, persuading African American women to be tested for HIV, or encouraging low-income parents not to smoke around their children. A policy change goal might involve revising the new Medicare law to allow the government to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies for discounts on prescription drug prices, authorizing more funding for sexual health education in a local school district, or banning tobacco advertising in urban neighborhoods. Both types of goals can be pursued as part of a campaign, but should involve separate plans since the decisionmakers, audiences, and messages for each type will be quite different (Spitfire Strategies 2004).

Public awareness efforts most often target policymakers and opinion leaders; the media; or segments of the public, such as people eligible for a particular program or at risk for a particular health condition. Communications experts agree that public education campaigns aimed at the general public rarely work well, because it is impossible to find generic messages that resonate with or compel everyone (Spitfire Strategies 2004). Successful communications endeavors look for leverage by targeting particular stakeholders, rather than attempting to educate everyone (FoundationWorks 2003). A campaign might have several intended audiences, but should have a different strategy for each one.

Public education campaigns do best when they are informed by professional market research, linked to specific policy goals, targeted to key legislative districts or specific media markets, linked to complementary efforts at the state and local levels, and provide a means for the public to get engaged (Holton 2002). Effective campaigns begin with good stories, with a clearly identifiable hero and objective, at least one memorable fact, and a role for the audience to play (Goodman 2003). And

of course, the message of the campaign should be based on the value system of the audience, rather than the value system of the funder.

**BUILDING A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

- What are you trying to do?
- Which decisionmakers can make your goal a reality?
- How will you know that what you are doing is working?
- What are the assets and challenges of your organization that may impact this plan?
- What is already happening outside your organization that may impact this plan?
- Do you need a plan that will fortify and amplify, frame, or reframe the debate?
- Who must you reach to achieve your goal?
- What existing beliefs can you tap into to reach your audience?
- What is your overall strategy?
- What key points do you want to make to your target audience?
- Who has the best chance of resonating with your target audience?
- How are you going to get your message to your audience using your chosen approach?

Source: Spitfire Strategies 2004.

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTMAKERS**

Grantmakers are using public education campaigns in a number of different ways in social change efforts across the world.

- **Increasing public awareness about community needs** – In November 2002, nonprofit organizations in the Washington, DC region were facing a critical funding crisis: the downturn in the stock market had eroded foundation endowments, government cutbacks were looming, and lower earnings had flattened corporate giving. To combat this funding crisis, a broad coalition of funders, nonprofit

umbrella organizations, and media partners came together to encourage citizens of the region to become regular donors to the local nonprofit organizations providing critical services in the local community. The coalition developed a public awareness campaign to highlight the work of local nonprofits and give individual donors a safe and convenient way to donate funds on-line and find local volunteer opportunities in their neighborhood. The goals of the campaign are to raise awareness among key decisionmakers and the public of the region's nonprofit sector so that over time, giving is increased; to help the local nonprofit community increase its organizational capacity through the effective use of on-line philanthropy tools and resources; to improve the ability of residents of greater Washington to make informed giving decisions, by providing transparency to the region's nonprofit sector as a whole; to help connect people, as donors and as volunteers, to a wide range of nonprofit organizations through a safe, easy Web site; and to serve as the region's on-line gathering place to find emergency-related resources and donate money or time in support of local nonprofits in the event of a regional crisis.

► **Educating the media in order to inform the public debate** – Part of the California HealthCare Foundation's (CHCF) communications strategy is to be a source of reliable, objective information about California health care policy issues. In September 2004, the foundation and the Center for Governmental Studies (CGS) launched a campaign to provide the public and press with impartial information about the five health-related propositions on California's November ballot. The campaign included an easy-to-use Web site with unbiased, in-depth information on each initiative; promotion to media and opinion leaders via regular e-mails featuring news from the site; public affairs forums; and public opinion polling. The campaign garnered nearly 50 interviews with CGS and CHCF experts about the initiatives by major media in the state. An average of 175 reporters opened the weekly news e-mails, and follow-up on-line and phone surveys of media found that those who were aware of the site found it helpful in writing their stories. Foundation staff are confident that they met their objectives of helping to inform the coverage and discussion of the initiatives; providing an objective resource for the media and public; and enhancing the foundation's reputation as a reliable, objective resource that uses the Internet creatively to disseminate and market information.

► **Mobilizing policymakers and opinion leaders around health crises** – The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation have entered into a three-year public education partnership to build a national climate in which social and political leaders in India have the technical knowledge to mobilize effective and sustainable HIV/AIDS initiatives. With \$2.4 million from the Gates Foundation, \$250,000 from the Kaiser Family

Foundation, and an estimated \$14 million in airtime from the media company Star India, the campaign will use public service announcements, on-line and print content, television and radio programming, and a series of educational events to raise awareness about the epidemic and impact public perceptions of the disease. In addition to the campaign, the project will convene a leadership council to unite prominent leaders in the areas of business, entertainment, government, media, nongovernmental organizations, and society to influence public opinion on HIV/AIDS in India. The public education campaign began in July 2004, with a television message featuring Indian cricket star Rahul Dravid.

► **Educating patients about their health care options** – The Retirement Research Foundation has made a two-year grant of over \$200,000 to support the Public Action Foundation's *Medicare Prescription Drugs Advocacy and Education Campaign*. This statewide outreach effort will provide Illinois seniors with the knowledge needed to compare existing state health care programs with the new Medicare drug program; recruit senior volunteers as potential leaders and future advocates for changes in the law and regulations; educate state health care administrators on the concerns older adults have about the new law and the challenges they face; and educate the media, community organizations, service providers, and others reaching out to beneficiaries to inform them of how the state and federal prescription drug programs work.

*This article is part of GIH's portfolio, Agents of Change: Health Philanthropy's Role in Transforming Systems. Each article focuses on an approach grantmakers are using to promote systemic or social change. The entire portfolio is available on GIH's Web site [www.gih.org](http://www.gih.org).*

## SOURCES

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