



A TOOL KIT

# **Fighting Back on Budget Cuts**

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## Overview and Purpose of this Publication

All over the country, health programs are facing severe budget crises. Vital programs are slated for deep cuts and the human toll is hard to fathom. Tobacco control programs, like much of the work around chronic disease and prevention, have come under particularly heavy pressure. *This publication is designed to be a resource for organizers, community groups, and public agencies at various levels of capacity working to build support for healthy budget priorities.* This "kit" will help groups better understand the economic context in which budget cuts are taking place, develop strategic communications and organizing plans for approaching this issue, and gain tools and methods for researching state budget processes.



PHOTO COURTESY OF NMFPO

In developing this kit, we worked from three assumptions:

1. It will require broad, multi-issue coalitions in each state to beat back these cuts, and these coalitions must be formed around our common interests
2. We have to expose problems with the budget *process* as well as with budget spending *priorities*
3. It will be important to go beyond defending our programs to posing alternatives, especially ways to increase revenues at the state level and increased matching funds at the federal level.

## Background

### *What Went Wrong*

#### **The Bubble Bursts**

In the 90s, too many states and localities believed the unrealistically rosy predictions of non-stop economic growth and put very little away in "rainy day" funds when revenues were uncharacteristically high. This growth was powered by inflated stock prices and the temporary boom in technology, both of which have since settled into a more sustainable (and slower) rate of growth. With the boom over, growth has slowed way down, taking revenues, jobs, and income down with it. State budgets were projecting a faster rate of growth and therefore they predicted that more revenues and jobs would be available than actually were created. The difference in projections in many states

was quite significant, leading to big gaps in income to cover budgeted expenses. It's like basing your household budget on money you think will come. You write checks hoping that more money will come in to cover them, but then it doesn't come, and things go haywire.

### **Bad Budget Processes**

Unfortunately, the budget process that determines the forecast, the amount of money in the budget, as well as how much is put at risk in investments is a fairly closed process. You may have asked yourself: How could this year be so different from last year? Couldn't they have done a better job of forecasting? The process for determining a state budget amount is not simple math. It is a highly political process determined by a small number of people. Key questions like the role of stock market investments and risk in the sudden shortfalls, the basis of current projections, and the formula for calculating reserves and future trends are important, often forgotten aspects of the budget. Even legislators are hesitant to get involved in this area of public finance and ask the hard questions. However, with some prodding, you can find a few champions willing to take it on. But you don't have to take a back seat. Much of these processes can be surfaced with a well-worded Freedom of Information Action (FOIA) request, especially if it includes a request for correspondence and memoranda used in developing the budget. Use the information to push for more access, openness and reform because we can't win this game by playing defense alone. Advocates will have to develop longer-term strategies that go beyond fighting for programs to reforming the process. The following link will take you to a sample request letter: <http://splc.org/foiletter.asp>

#### **Reality Check 1: Beyond Band-Aids**

Organizing and advocacy strictly around “self-interest” can be ineffective especially when done by organizations/agencies that are not connecting their own budget cuts with larger issues. Legislators often see through the veiled self-interest, and other groups may be hesitant to provide advocacy support if your goals are too self-serving. **Joining forces and advocating for adequate funding to address larger social issues and root causes, not just your program, is vital.**

### **Income has not kept up with expenses**

Tax cuts for top income earners and big business, paired with more regressive taxes for the poor and middle income, have meant that a larger chunk of state budgets are more dependent on taxing individual spending than more progressive income taxes. Most states have cut taxes for their richest constituents and increased regressive sales taxes and other user fees that take a bigger bite out of the pocketbooks of the poor. In fact, all but four states have more regressive taxes than they did in 1990. (*Pulling Apart: A*

*State-by-State Analysis of Income Trends* <http://www.cbpp.org/1-18-00sfp.htm>) Nearly half of all state revenues come from regressive taxes like excise taxes because state legislators would much rather tax the poor than offend the more affluent who vote and make campaign contributions.

**What about all those tobacco excise tax increases?**

Tobacco excise taxes provide the greatest amount of revenues at the beginning of the increase. After a while, the taxes provide less and less revenues because the higher prices cause some people to quit using tobacco or decrease their consumption, (which is why tobacco excise taxes are a good public health policy) and the costs of programs that tobacco tax revenues are used to fund tend to increase due to inflation. Health and social service program costs tend to increase more than usual in periods of economic dislocation. Currently, Medicaid and other healthcare costs are increasing at a rate of about eight percent annually. In short, our programs cannot sustain themselves on tobacco excise taxes alone.

**But there's the Master Settlement money, right?**

One thing that has buoyed health care budgets in many states has been money from tobacco Master Settlement Agreements (MSAs). A portion of these funds are paid to states as part of a settlement of a class action suit brought by states against tobacco companies to recoup tobacco related health care costs. In some states, a portion of MSA funds are specifically earmarked for tobacco programs and other health programs. However, even in states with seemingly strong protections of this earmarking in place, desperate legislatures facing large budget deficits are attempting to reallocate funds away from tobacco control in spite of agreements to the contrary. Our biggest vulnerability in most cases is our lack of a sizeable, passionate and political base (volunteers and others who support our issue and are willing to demonstrate that support in some tangible way) to defend against the cuts. The current crisis offers opportunities for creativity and collaboration that, if we do it right, can strengthen our work for the long term.

**Who's bearing the brunt?**

Although impacts vary from state to state, in many cases, women, seniors, children and communities of color are hardest hit. In doing your budget research, try to identify disparate impacts and unfairness in the process by looking for race, class, gender, or age biases in how cuts are proposed. Do the cuts raise institutional barriers and create disparities in who is uninsured? Given the close connection of employment to health insurance coverage, how will these cuts exacerbate employment discrimination, education inequities and other issues that contextualize health indicators? A recent Institute of Medicine study does an excellent job making the case for how lack of insurance has wide ranging impact on communities, *A Shared Destiny: Community Effects of Uninsurance* [http://www.iom.edu/iom/iomhome.nsf/WFiles/Uninsured4final/\\$file/Uninsured4final.pdf](http://www.iom.edu/iom/iomhome.nsf/WFiles/Uninsured4final/$file/Uninsured4final.pdf). The Praxis Project has a tool, the *Equity Impact Statement*, for policymakers to consider legislative impact. The tool includes questions that can

help provide a framework for research in this area. [http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/EIR\\_template.pdf](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/EIR_template.pdf)

## Revenue Generation

*From Crumbs to Creating New "Pie"*

**ON TAXES:** *"The true severity of the present budget crisis may best be understood by the extent to which it is forcing elected officials with reputations for cutting taxes — both Republicans and Democrats — to propose tax increases. Although it is early in the budget season, 17 governors of both political parties all have called for increases in taxes in their states, indicating that such tax increases are necessary to avoid even more devastating reductions in public services."*

From *Is the State Fiscal Crisis Real?*

Nicholas Johnson, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2003

Given the current realities, it makes sense for us to look at a mix of revenue mechanisms -- especially when we are looking for ways to support health programs that tend to increase in cost over time (regardless of their long-term savings in other areas). One possible option is to look at restructuring income taxes in a more equitable or, in tax policy terms, *progressive* way. Income brackets are the increments at which a tax agency levies income



PHOTO: RAOUL DENNIS

taxes. The lowest income bracket is the minimum amount of money one would have to make in order to owe taxes, say \$5,000 to \$6,500 a year. The amount of taxes increase with each higher increment of annual income, with the highest bracket being the highest amount of tax levied. Of the 41 states with income taxes, a number of those states have top income brackets under \$25,000 per year. This means that a person making \$200,000 a year and a person making \$25,000 a year will pay the same amount of income taxes. In states like Idaho and Alabama, the top bracket is even lower.

Another important source of revenue is the federal match for state Medicaid spending. This amount is extremely low and considered unfair by many at the state level. State level advocates can join forces to push for increased matching funds. Working on these kinds of initiatives *in addition to excise taxes* can help build more stable revenues for programs and provide better support services and help soften the effects of

regressivity. Of course, we still need to raise those tobacco excise taxes and even tie them to inflation when we can.

*"While the federal tax system as a whole remains progressive, nearly all state tax systems are regressive. States rely more on regressive sales taxes and user fees than on progressive income taxes and, therefore, take a larger percentage of income from low- and middle-income families than from the wealthy. In the past few years, when many states have sought to cut taxes, nearly all have chosen to make the vast majority of the cuts in their progressive income taxes, rendering their tax systems even more regressive."*

***Pulling Apart: A State-By-State Analysis of Income Trends***

By Jared Bernstein, Elizabeth C. McNichol,  
Heather Boushey, Lawrence Mishel, and Robert Zahradnik  
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities  
and the Economic Policy Institute, 2002

## Why Budget Work Matters

Adequate funding is critical to realizing our long-term community organizing and policy advocacy goals. The follow-through, implementation, and oversight of our wins are often times just as important as the victory itself. Budget advocacy is a critical part of this follow-through. The good news is that, when crafted properly, advocacy on budget issues can avoid many of the lobbying restrictions faced by non-profit organizations and can even be considered "self defense" lobbying (lobbying to ensure your organization is in existence). In many cases, "self defense" lobbying isn't as restricted as other forms of lobbying. *Remember: Laws vary from state to state, different funders have additional restrictions, and the federal context changes, so be sure to confirm the propriety of any activity before undertaking it.*

Follow the links below to resources that will guide you in identifying key budget areas and potential sources of information. Please note that the worksheets are general and it will require some research to identify specific programs or budget line items. For example, a worksheet may lead you to advocate for increased funding to a state health insurance program but will not tell you the name of that program in your state.

- Worksheet 1: Identifying & Evaluating Budget Issues
- ProTex's The Real Budget – a model state alternative budget  
<http://www.protex.org/pdf/RealBudget.pdf>

## TOOL KIT: FIGHTING BACK ON BUDGET CUTS

- See Center on Budget and Policy Priorities' comprehensive series on the state fiscal crisis at <http://www.cbpp.org/statecrisis.htm> including:
  - <http://www.cbpp.org/3-1-03sfp-fact.htm> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report, *President's Claim of Nine Percent Increase in Aid to States Is Highly Misleading* by Richard Kogan and Iris J. Lav
  - <http://www.cbpp.org/2-18-03sfp.htm> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities report, *The State Fiscal Crisis Is Impeding Economic Growth; Federal Aid to States Would Be Most Effective Stimulus* by Iris J. Lav

## Worksheet 1: Identifying & Evaluating Budget Issues

Issue of Concern	Programs that effectively deal with the root causes of this issue	What is the history of funding these programs?*	What is the current status of the budget for these programs?*	What has been the impact of changes to the budget?	What budget changes need to happen to more effectively deal with the issues?
<p><i>eg. Lack of access to health care</i></p>	<p>(1) <i>Free state insurance program for low-income children</i></p> <p>(2) <i>City funded free clinics</i></p>	<p>(1) <i>Historically funded by the state with federal funds at \$5 million/yr</i></p> <p>(2) <i>Historically funded from City tax revenue at \$1 million/yr</i></p>	<p>(1) <i>The state shifted its federal dollars to a prescription plan, causing a 25% reduction in funding to the insurance program in 2002.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>Budget levels have remained consistent, but are threatened by a proposed City tax cut.</i></p>	<p>(1) <i>15,000 children lost eligibility for basic medical insurance, including doctor's visits.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>No changes, but the program meets the basic health needs of 2,500 low-income families.</i></p>	<p>(1) <i>Revenue to this program needs to be restored and increased another 15% to meet the health care access needs of the 22,000 uninsured low-income children in the state.</i></p> <p>(2) <i>Revenue levels should be increased by \$200,000 to open a new clinic location.</i></p>

**Important Questions to Ask When Doing Budget Research**

- What is the current budget allocation for this program?
- How does the current budget allocation compare to historic funding?
- What are the projections for the next budget cycle?
- If there have been changes, why has the funding for this area changed?
- Who have been the main advocates for this funding? Who has opposed this program's funding?
- Is the budget for this area meeting the need, or is more money necessary?
- Are there other issues that this one is usually pitted against when funding is put on the table?

If there are significant changes:

- What's the role new spending – like bio-terrorism and anti-terrorism?
- Does employment and shrinking income tax revenues play a role/
- Recent tax cuts? Tax breaks? Who benefited? Who was disadvantaged?
- What's at stake?

What are opportunities for increasing revenues? (Excise taxes, licensing fees, raising income tax brackets, etc.)

Your analysis will lead you to potential allies. Make sure to keep track of those who share the problem, their interests, and how to reach them; any potential collaborative proposals on which you can work together; and any potential champions in the legislature that are supportive and can move the issue.

**Sources of Information**

- *National advocacy groups that deal with your issues (e.g., Children's Defense Fund)*
- The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org>)
- Public documents made available online in compliance with your Legislature's rules concerning electronic publishing of documents and public disclosure laws.
- Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) filing. To learn how to file one with a state agency to gain access to documents, visit the Student Press Law Center's Fully Automated, Fill-in-the-Blanks State Open Records Law Request Letter Generator at <http://splc.org/foiletter.asp>.
- Your local State legislator and staff
- Statewide and local progressive budget coalitions

- Your local City Council member and staff have access to state officials in ways you may not.
- See our materials on Local Budget advocacy:  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Guide\\_to\\_budgets.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Guide_to_budgets.doc)

***Identifying the People, Process and Institutions that Make the Budget Happen***

What	Who
Give us information to develop our timeline	
Pinpoint department(s) we need to target	
Assesses/evaluates current budget in the targeted department	
Develops recommendations for proposed budget	
Approves targeted budget area before it goes to legislative committee	
Management committee that puts proposed budget together for Legislature/Governor	
Help us analyze proposed budget/develop alternatives	
Key staff that guides the budget process	
Legislators who will be likely allies	
Legislators needing pressure/lobbying	
Legislators who will be likely opponents	
Staff responsible for managing public participation in the budget process (clerks who set agenda, meeting, etc.)	
Media that regularly cover the budget process	

## Whoa! Before We Start

### *Why Are We Really Doing This?*

As some of us find ourselves in a sudden fight to keep a local or state funded program alive, our first concern is to protect the program even as we lament the lack of time and resources to insure its survival. Many of us, especially those working in traditional service organizations, have been taught that the task of budget advocacy (among many things) is up to organization/program staff, “professionals who know.” Creating opportunities for community members to take leadership roles in advocacy can seem to take too much time and not appear worthy of the effort. This is particularly true when we are struggling with preconceptions about our constituents' communication and language skills, their capacity to learn fast enough, and their resources, interest and savvy to help direct the fight. We might also feel that we don't have the skills, knowledge base or capacity to successfully take on this type of community-led, capacity building work.



PHOTO: RAOUL DENNIS

While issue-based budget and policy advocacy done by “professionals” is important, the truth of the matter is that unless real people are up at the capitol representing their issues, those issues will be ignored. And since we are often not the ones writing hefty checks to state legislators, we need a base of passionate constituents to make the case to policymakers. And that's a good thing because the real change we seek will only come to be when those that are affected are in the driver's seat.

We should always ask ourselves the hard questions: *Is this process building the skills and knowledge of my constituents? Is it really using the wealth of resources that my constituents have or is it promoting more typical, passive, back seat roles that grassroots communities are usually relegated to? (e.g. trip chaperones)? Is this process being led by constituents and are we supporting this process? How is my organization developing the capacity to support this work?* The tools/links in **MAKING IT RELEVANT TO YOUR COMMUNITY** below provides some context and ideas for actively engaging community members through the use of popular education and participatory learning and action.

It helps to remember that you are accountable to your constituents. Sharing the struggle with them—win or lose—gives them first-hand knowledge of your work and all the intricacies involved, which ultimately gives you allies that can support the work and build the credibility of the program.

### **Reality Check 2: Respect, Recognize, Use and Raise Your Community's Skills, Knowledge and Experience**

Are you including your constituents and allies in the action planning process? If not, you may find yourself repeating this process again in order to get the necessary folk at the table. Remember, taking the time to build capacity and effective relationships will make the work more successful in the long run.

## **Making It Relevant to Your Community**

### *Using Popular Education*

Popular education is a process of using participant-based learning to uncover root causes of social, economic, and political problems and using this analysis to move a group into action for a more just world. Many groups around the world have developed popular education workshops that use people's experience to create the necessary groundwork for change to occur. In the United States, popular education has strong roots in a variety of social movements, including the early labor movements of the 1930s and the Freedom and Citizenship Schools of the Civil Rights Movement.

When led by a skilled facilitator, popular education can help groups assess a situation by identifying needs and uncovering root causes of problems (through tools like community mapping and power analysis), develop an alternate vision for society, create plans for enacting change, and participate in the evaluation and further planning for long-term goals. Throughout this process, popular education reinforces the capacity building and development of people as leaders for change.

The links below lead you to organizations that specialize in providing popular education and action planning tools that involve community members as active participants and leaders in the process. Some of these tools are specifically designed around health and budget issues, others can be easily adapted.

## **Resources and Links**

### *Popular Education*

- Highlander Center [www.highlandercenter.org](http://www.highlandercenter.org)

- Project South [www.projectsouth.org](http://www.projectsouth.org)
- Theatre of the Oppressed/Legislative Theater  
[www.mandalaforchange.com](http://www.mandalaforchange.com)
- Grassroots Policy Project [www.grassrootspolicy.org](http://www.grassrootspolicy.org)
- United For a Fair Economy [www.ufenet.org](http://www.ufenet.org)

*Advocacy & Grassroots Organizing*

- Midwest Academy [www.midwestacademy.com](http://www.midwestacademy.com)
- Center for Third World Organizing [www.ctwo.org](http://www.ctwo.org)

## **Building Relationships & Identifying Allies**

*Who Else Cares About This Issue?*

Building relationships and coalitions is an absolute necessity for effective organizing and advocacy, especially around budget issues. Be strategic about choosing your partners. **Worksheet 2: Ally Matrix** is designed to help you evaluate potential allies as you move forward in your budget advocacy.

## Worksheet 2: Ally Matrix

Brainstorm a list of potential allies who care about your issue and might be willing to take some action. Allies can be formal organizations with staff (e.g. non-profits), volunteer organizations (e.g. tenant associations, block associations), church groups, non-profits, community organizing groups that work with diverse communities of color, or individuals. However, do not identify a category of people (e.g. welfare recipients) unless there is a viable way of developing a relationship with them (e.g. through a welfare rights group).

After you have developed your initial list of allies, place their name in the first column of the table below. Then check off each appropriate box to the right that describes this ally. The more checks that follow a particular ally, the more valuable they are and the more emphasis you should place on involving them in your budget advocacy. In addition, you should also look for partners who complement your own abilities. For example if you have strong influence with legislators, you might lower the priority of this attribute when evaluating potential partners.

In the example below, the tenant association is identified as a potential ally who sees their issue as tied to yours and can bring other constituents to the table. Organizations/individuals with more checks would be better potential allies, unless the tenant association attributes are particularly weak areas of your developing coalition.

Potential Ally	Do you have an existing relationship?	Do they see their issue tied to yours?	Do they have influence w/ legislators or decision-makers ?	Can they bring other constituents to the table?	Do they have strong media contacts?	Do you have other reasons to build a relationship with them?	Will you build new organizational relationships? (i.e., groups of color, etc.)	OTHER considerations unique to your organization/ program	OTHER considerations unique to your organization/ program
<i>e.g. Tenant Association</i>		☑		☑					

## The Science Of Numbers

*From "Tips on Base Building" by Akili.*

*Adapted with author's permission*

Recruiting volunteers is like working in a great sifter -- the more you shake a sifter, the more its contents fall through the cracks. Building big numbers of volunteers requires talking to a lot more people than you need -- and making it very easy (not too many shakes!) for them to make a contribution. If it's too difficult to get involved (i.e., they have to call and get the meeting place, there's no child care, they have to make up a script to help you call volunteers, etc.) they will probably "fall through the cracks."

Some common recruitment equations:

- In order to get 50 people to show up when the issue is not hot, 150-200 names are needed.
- If the names are cold and people are not familiar with the group or issue, more names will be needed.
- Thirty percent or more of the people called will not be at home; 15-20% of the numbers will not be good numbers; 25-30% will be no's; 25-30% will say yes. Of those who say yes, only a small percent will actually show.
- Using a "warm" list, out of the 20 people talked to, nine will say yes and three to four will show.

Common methods for mobilizing include the following:

***House meetings.*** These gatherings are often hosted by volunteers in order to organize a local area. The host will invite friends and neighbors to refreshments and a presentation on the issue by someone in coalition leadership.

***Phone bank recruitment.*** Volunteers and/or staff calling phone lists to recruit new volunteers.

***Canvassing.*** Staff and/or volunteers going door-to-door to raise public awareness of the initiative and recruit supporters.

There are certainly many more ways to get the word out but there's nothing like direct contact (either by phone or in person) to get people into action.

Other important things to remember:

- Every 3-4 months there will be a need to rebuild with a new group of people. People will move on to another level, get involved in something else, or become inactive.
- Develop ways to assist people to move to deeper levels of commitment. Core supporters need to work with new people; conduct orientation, plan parties for new supporters
- It is important to develop recruitment systems including scripts to prompt volunteers, and mechanisms for tracking, follow-up and accountability. See **Elements of a Script**.

#### **Elements of a Script**

1. Introduction: who you are; identify the group
2. Statement of conditions and the need to take immediate action: *Regents are meeting next month to approve the budget and...*
3. Statement of hope: *People can make a difference and we need your help because we can't do it alone.*
4. What you can do: *Come help us get the Governor to reinstate funding for kids... The meeting/ rally is at...Here are other things you can do...*
5. Get a commitment: *Will you join us? Yes or no. Maybe's cannot be counted or measured.*

## **Create an Issue-Based Action Plan**

In previous sections of this toolkit, you have already identified several of the key components of your action plan. You have identified and evaluated your advocacy goals and selected potential allies. However, you still have some critical questions to answer as you move forward in completing your action strategy. The following link will bring you to an action planning chart (based on action kits developed by the Midwest Academy and other community organizing groups) to help you take the pieces you already have and weave them into a strategic plan.

**Reality Check 3: Be Proactive, Not Reactive**

Developing the skills and capacity of your organization and constituents is not a quick process. Doing it in the face of a budget crisis is not as effective as investing in capacity building before the crisis hits. By the same token, understanding the budget process and getting ahead of the curve is an important part of this capacity building process. Check in with other organizations in your area that are already active in budget advocacy. It is a great way to learn where and when to extend your resources.

- Worksheet 3: Action Planning Chart (see below)
- Developing a Policy Initiative Template:  
<http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/developinitiative.pdf>

## Worksheet 3: Action Planning Chart

Advocacy Goals	Potential Opponents to Your Goals	Who Do You Need to Influence?	Action Steps/Tactics	Person/Organization Responsible and Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Include the goals that you identified in previous sections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Who are the people opposing what we want?</li> <li>♦ What strategies are they using to make their case?</li> <li>♦ Who are they connected to/influencing?</li> <li>♦ How much influence/strength do they have?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ What person/people has the power to make the decision we want made? Keep in mind that it is very important to identify specific individuals (e.g. Council Member Smith) and not institutions (e.g. the Budget Committee). For budget decisions, the decision-makers are almost always elected officials.</li> <li>♦ Where do these individuals stand on our issue?</li> <li>♦ What influence do we have with them?</li> <li>♦ What individuals have power/influence over the decision-makers, even if they don't have official decision-making power?</li> <li>♦ What influence do we have with these people?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Identify actions that best use the influence and power of your constituents and allies to make each decision-maker vote in favor of your budget position</li> <li>♦ Action steps should                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Be culturally and language/communication relevant to your constituents and allies</li> <li>○ Be creative</li> <li>○ Build your constituents' skills and capacity</li> <li>○ Be directed at the right people</li> <li>○ Take into account your opponents' strategy</li> <li>○ Be attainable given organizational resources</li> <li>○ Be custom-designed for each decision-maker</li> </ul> </li> <li>♦ Sample tactics include:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Public hearings/forums</li> <li>○ Council Member visits</li> <li>○ Voter turnout</li> <li>○ Press Conferences</li> <li>○ Sit-ins</li> <li>○ Etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Assign each action step to a member of the coalition and set timelines that keep in mind the budget process</li> </ul>

## Doing Media Advocacy

For better or worse, media are clearly central to setting the public agenda, with news media playing a particularly important role as the public’s “official story.” It is virtually a given that what story is chosen for coverage and how it is covered largely determine public sentiment—especially among public officials. You’ve probably already found in your planning process that getting coverage for your work is absolutely critical if you are to be successful in your advocacy efforts. The following section provides a framework for how to initiate this media work. There will be additional links to other Praxis Project media planning tools throughout this section.



PHOTO: RAOUL DENNIS

***Set clear goals.*** What are you trying to accomplish? What outlets are you trying to reach? This is the most important step in preparing for media advocacy because it will define what you communicate about and to whom you’ll be communicating. Identifying goals require an honest assessment of the group’s strengths and weaknesses, the political climate, and thorough research of the available options.

***Know who you are talking to.*** Most media advocacy is focused on policymakers because it is policymakers that have the power to enact the desired change. In some cases, groups use media advocacy to mobilize supporters as a preliminary step to targeting policymakers. It’s important to note that although media can support organizing goals, it can never be a substitute for organizing. That’s why most groups shape their media strategy to target policymakers and support their organizing.

***Spend time researching how your “targets” get their information.*** Most elected officials and other gatekeepers read the editorial pages of local newspapers to gauge community concerns. Television news also helps set the public agenda and affects the “public conversation” on a particular issue. In any case, identifying the target will help shape a more effective and efficient strategy.

***Know what you’re saying.*** Now you are ready to take the final step in preparation: developing a message. A message is not a soundbite or a slogan (although it can help shape them). It is the overarching theme that neatly frames your initiative for your target audience. Messages should be relatively short, easy to understand, emotive and visual. The message should reflect the hard work and research that went into developing the initiative and should be supportive of the overall strategy.

It’s best to ***test messages on friends and co-workers*** -- especially those who are not familiar with your issue. Colleagues working on similar issues are another good resource. Listen carefully to feedback: Did the message convey the importance of your

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issue? Did they “get” it? Keeping your target in mind, use the input to help shape and refine your message.

More on Media Planning:

- Getting Ready for Media Advocacy:  
<http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/MA-BRF1.pdf>
- Media Planning Template:  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/MEDIA\\_PLANNING\\_TEMPLATE.pdf](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/MEDIA_PLANNING_TEMPLATE.pdf)

## Identifying Your Stories

It's important to translate the issue from abstract cuts into human stories. What are the compelling stories behind your state's budget negotiations? Here are some places to start looking. It works best when these stories are juxtaposed against "bad" spending priorities.

Potential Story Themes	Where to Begin
Raising new revenues	How long has it been since new revenues were raised? How much do these revenues really amount to when you control for inflation? What are some cool proposals? Any recent tax cuts causing problems. Can you compare increases in regressive taxes and decreases in progressive ones?
Pulling Open the Budget Curtain	What's the real process? What non-elected have influence? FOIA the agency that does the budget prep work to get the real details.
Health and health care threats and losses	What's at stake? Who will be hurt? What cuts have broad impact if only the public knew?
Cessation and treatment makes a difference	A grandma who was finally able to quit smoking. A cancer survivor receiving program support. In what ways is our work making a difference?
Youth programs and interventions that changed lives	Are young people learning important lessons of democracy and activism? Better indicators for youth health and well being? Let the public know.
Who's on the frontlines	Who's hit the hardest by the cuts? Who's protected? If your state is like most, it's children, women, people of color and seniors that will be hurt the most. Look for disparate impact, bias, and unfairness. Look for who benefits: big business? Politician pet programs?
Making the case for developing the public and non-profit sectors as a vital part of the economy.	Cutting public and nonprofit jobs hurts the economy even more than losing private sector (especially service) jobs. With state budget cuts, you lose important higher wage jobs with benefits and local spending power. <i>What's the percentage of public and nonprofit jobs in your state?</i> In many states, about one in five jobs is created in the public or nonprofit sector. Some states are closer to one in four. It's important that reporters understand that these jobs and programs are not mere fiscal "pork". They are important engines of the state economy.

## Telling Your Stories

***Identify and compile the right spokespeople.*** Who is the best person to deliver the message? Are you representing the breadth of the diversity of communities affected? What will your opponents be saying? What will be strong counter images and messages?

***Identify a broad range of outlets through which to tell your stories, including media in languages other than English.*** Be sure to have spokespeople who can communicate in other languages. These audiences are key voters and potential supporters.

***Don't forget to practice messages so that everyone is comfortable and stays "on message"*** or, in other words, no one gets off track or says anything to contradict what you are trying to communicate. Roleplay interviews and tough questions. Practice responding with your message without getting off track. Remember, you are communicating with your target audience through the reporter. Speak accordingly.

***Avoid press conferences*** unless you are sure to attract press. When possible, look for other newsworthy events on which you can piggyback.

***Cultivate reporters who are already covering the issue*** through one-on-one meetings and phone calls, and sending well-packaged, concise information with contact info for spokespeople. When packaging information, think of the data, spokespeople and other information reporters will need to do a good job covering the issue.

## Main Frames: Messaging Ideas

*(Use these to brainstorm and test your own messages)*

1. **Putting Revenues on the Table: You've done the math and there's no way to float more tax cuts *and have viable* programs.**
  - You can't keep cutting to stop the bleeding. The Legislature has got to come to grips with the fact that we must raise revenues if we are to face these new challenges of funding anti-terrorism and safety at home.
  - Unfortunately, the federal government wants states to engage in all this new spending without providing any new funding. Washington has to get real and free up the dollars for state matching funds. They can't pass the buck without passing some more bucks to the states.

2. **Opening up the Process: You've done the research and you've found undue influence by a few bureaucrats, curious losses due to stock investments and inadequate regulation concerning the amount of risk your state can take on concerning the investment of public funds.**
  - This process is way too important to play out in back room deals. The legislature must ensure that the public's budget is a public process.
3. **Countering Inevitability: Mainstream budget messages argue that there is no choice – programs have to go, but your research shows some items (legislator favorites perhaps?) are being kept in the budget that don't appear to be necessities.**
  - From Youth: The Governor says that cutting health and education programs for seniors and kids must be done, yet there are no cuts in special programs for big business. I can't vote and I can't make the large donations that big business does. I thought that an elected official would just do what's right.
  - From Elders: I've worked and paid by taxes for more than fifty years. The Governor is cutting important programs for seniors but there is still money for big contracts for big business. Those don't seem like the right priorities. What are folk like me supposed to do? Lose my independence? Move in with my children?
4. **Big Tobacco Behind the Curtain: Tobacco control is taking a bigger hit than other programs because your Governor and Legislature is getting some tobacco industry pressure. Maybe it's time to get your "electeds" to take the Tobacco Free *Legislative Challenge* (Can they legislate without tobacco influence?)**
  - It seems that the budget cuts are more a reflection of private pressure by big donors, like the tobacco industry, than public priorities.
  - Big tobacco lobbyists are hazardous to our health programs. It's time the Legislature/Governor vote in the public interest and resist the backroom pressure.
5. **You Need to Show 'em What You're Working With: The Governor and the Legislature have little or no knowledge of what's been accomplished with the funding and how their constituents are affected.**
  - Here are resources that the state of Indiana used in their successful campaign to maintain funding for this year as well as some of what their using to fight next year's proposed budget cuts:

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- Budget Talking Points (MS Word, 58K):  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_budget\\_talking\\_points.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_budget_talking_points.doc)
- Sample Media “Cheat Sheets” (MS Word, 390K):  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_sample\\_media\\_cheat\\_sheets.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_sample_media_cheat_sheets.doc)
- Sample Editorial (MS Word, 34K):  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_sample\\_editorial.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_sample_editorial.doc)
- Sample News Release (English) (MS Word, 40K):  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_sample\\_news\\_release\\_english.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_sample_news_release_english.doc)
- Sample News Release (Spanish) (MS Word, 38K):  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_sample\\_news\\_release\\_spanish.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_sample_news_release_spanish.doc)
- TownHall Meeting How to Guide (MS Word, 35K):  
[http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_townhall\\_planning\\_guide.doc](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_townhall_planning_guide.doc)
- Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids print ad to support dedicated tobacco control funding (PDF, 380K):  
[www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_CTFK\\_ad.pdf](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_CTFK_ad.pdf)
- PowerPoint Presentation on Indiana's New Campaign (PPT, 143K):  
[www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana\\_PowerPoint.ppt](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/Indiana_PowerPoint.ppt)

## Getting the Word Out

*Got ads?* Good! But most of us don't. Here are some ideas for low cost and "earned media" -- media you pay for in sweat, not dollars:

*Op-eds* -- articles you write that are published in the opinion section of the newspaper.

*Letters to the editor* -- Elected officials pay attention to letters and op-eds generated in their district so plan to generate lots of independent letters to key media outlets. Meet with the paper's editorial board as well. And don't forget to include letters and op-ed pieces in ethnic media including pieces written in languages other than English. **We Interrupt This Message** has a great media guide that helps economic justice advocates write press releases and editorials, do press events, prepare for editorial board meetings and more. Go their site and download it in PDF format here:  
<http://www.interrupt.org/pdfs/MEDIA%20KIT.pdf>

***Flash and internet campaigns*** -- are low cost video-like productions that can be done using animation software right on your own computer. Add them to your website. Send them to staffers and other key opinion leaders via email, including journalists covering the state capitol beat. <http://flashkit.com/links/Ratings> lists a number of different software options. For examples of flash ideas, see Amnesty International USA's piece on conflict diamonds at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/diamonds/d4.html>, or <http://www.grassrootsunity.org>.

***Call-in talk radio, even if it isn't the topic of discussion*** -- Yes, you can call in and talk about anything. And best of all it's free! So, if the topic is the war, talk about budget cuts to pay for it and the choices legislators are making. If it's schooling, talk about the impact of budget cuts on kids. You get the idea.

***Do it yourself*** -- Record interviews and press events and self publish it on your site or on internet radio sites. Convene local experts (even over the phone) to discuss key budget issues and webcast or even tape the discussion. Work with your local Independent Media Center (or IMC) to produce and disseminate news and information on the issues. In some cases, good audiotapes edited down to 30 minutes or less with well-known experts can be distributed to legislative staffers or made available on your website for background information on your issue. To find out if there's an IMC near you, visit their website at [www.indymedia.org](http://www.indymedia.org)

***Don't forget youth, ethnic, and alternative media!*** These are important media outlets with broad reach. In many cases, "ethnic" media have a larger audience than the local "mainstream" media outlet. Tailor your articles and pitches to the audience and make sure your information is relevant and up to date. Ask yourself, "What moves them? What do they care about?" Many ethnic media publishing and broadcasting in languages other than English will translate press releases and accept story pitches in English. However, it's great to have contacts that are able to effectively communicate in the media outlet's distribution language – especially for in-depth interviews.

For help developing a more comprehensive communications plan, click here [http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/MEDIA\\_PLANNING\\_TEMPLATE.pdf](http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools/MEDIA_PLANNING_TEMPLATE.pdf) and other resources <http://www.thepraxisproject.org/tools>.

## **We're Here to Help**

The Praxis Project is here to provide technical assistance and support to help you make a difference in this important fight. In some cases, we can provide direct support in the form of strategic consultation in the area of community organizing, communications strategy, and budget analysis. For more information, please contact our Training Director, Marta Vizuela at [mvizueta@thepraxisproject.org](mailto:mvizueta@thepraxisproject.org).

## Glossary of Terms

**Budget Advocacy:** Engaging a constituency to organize for increased and/or adequate funding to address social issues.

**Capacity Building:** Increasing the skills, abilities, and infrastructure of a particular group or community to successfully advance issues of social justice and quality of life.

**Community Mapping:** Participatory exercise in which community members identify the assets and challenges in their neighborhood. Can be used as an essential component of creating an action plan.

**Excise Taxes:** Taxes that are levied on the volume of business or a particular good sold (not including real estate or property).

**FOIA:** The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is a procedure whereby any member of the public may obtain many kinds of public agency records.

**Income Bracket:** Income brackets are the increments at which income taxes are levied. The lowest income bracket is the minimum amount of money one would have to make in order to owe taxes. The highest bracket is the “ceiling” at which there are no more increases in the tax levied.

**Master Settlement Agreement:** In 1998, the attorneys general of 46 states signed a Master Settlement Agreement with the six largest tobacco companies in the United States. The agreement, which places some limits on tobacco advertising, includes payments to states by major tobacco companies totaling an estimated \$206 billion over 25 years. The tobacco companies also agreed to open previously secret industry documents and disband industry trade groups.

**Media Advocacy:** The strategic use of news media and, when appropriate, paid advertising, to support community organizing to advance a public policy initiative. (From Wallack, Lawrence, et. al. *News for a Change*, 1999)

**Popular Education:** A process using participant-based learning to uncover root causes of social, economic and political oppression and using this analysis to move a group into action for a more just world. Continuous use of reflection, planning and action, to build conscience and capacity among participants.

**Power Analysis:** A participatory process in which groups identify those who have economic, social or political power in a given situation and the strategies and tactics used to maintain such power. This analysis is used to evaluate the action strategies for realizing institutional and systemic change.

**Progressive Taxes:** Taxes that increase as the amount subject to taxes increase. In other words, if one makes more, they pay more. If they make less, they pay less.

**“Rainy Day” Funds:** General funds held in reserve in case of economic downturn or other event that affects revenues. Most rainy day funds are set at a certain percentage of revenues. Often, these funds are used to reduce outstanding debt.

**Regressive Taxes:** Taxes that take a larger percentage of money from low income than high income people. These are taxes that levy the same amount of money regardless of income so that the poorer you are the more you pay.

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