



Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

2 Framing an advocacy message

“Reframing, when done correctly, can raise your issue to agenda status by qualifying it as a social or public issue.”

Frames are ways of thinking or reasoning that shape the way we see the world. These ways of thinking are based on deeply held moral values that guide our thinking about ourselves and our behaviour as individuals or society. At issue are shared meanings for concepts like “freedom”, “justice”, “community”, “success”, “citizenship”, and “responsibility”, among others. These are among the values that drive us to communal action.

As such, reframing is communications -- how we express something in a particular type of language to make people understand what we are talking about. Communication resonates with people’s deeply held values and worldviews, it is frame-based and, when it is effective, people can see an issue from a different perspective. New language is required for new frames.

“Gender equality”, for example, is often viewed as antagonistic – women fighting men -- rather than being seen as “women as citizens”. UNIFEM’s Who Answers to Women 2008 reframes gender equality through the language it uses, defining gender equality as central to the values of justice, equality, access, representation and participation.

- Gender equality as intrinsic to democracy;
- Women as citizens, instead of women as marginalised groups;
- women as citizens first, not women; and

- Gender equality as an issue of accountability.

The news media, as the main source of information about public affairs, plays an important role in framing issues. Media doesn’t simply tell us what to think about, it tells us how to think about issues. In this way, it dramatically influences what issues the public and their policymakers will address.

News coverage influences:

- What issues people think are important for government to address (agenda-setting)
- The lens through which people interpret issues (framing), and
- What information will prove relevant for social and political judgments?

Understanding framing is therefore critical to advocacy. Often, gaining public support on an advocacy issue requires reframing of that issue to a new shared meaning, as with the above example of UNIFEM’s reframing of “gender equality”. Reframing, when done correctly can raise your issue to agenda status by qualifying it as a social or public problem or issue. In considering how you want to reframe your advocacy issue for maximum impact, consider the following:

Context

Context establishes the cause of the problem and who is responsible for solving it. In establishing the context, you must be strategic in identifying the problem or issue as one that affects community as a whole and not just individuals.

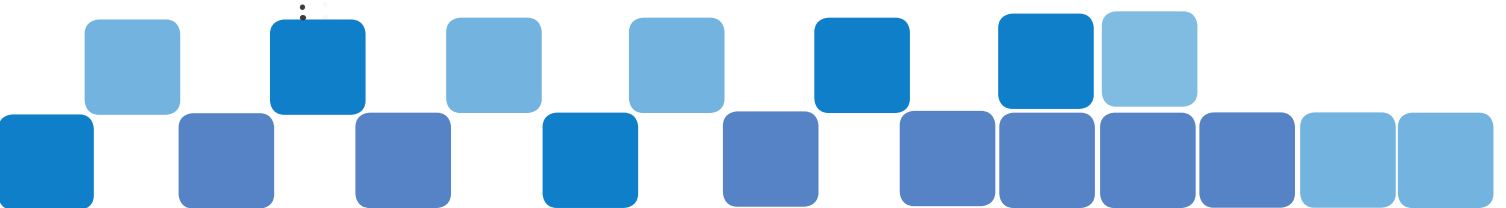
An example is domestic violence. People may be sympathetic to victims but they are also likely to view it as someone else’s personal problem that does not affect them. It is therefore important to provide the broader context, for example insufficient allocation of state resources for training police officers to handle domestic violence cases, women’s economic status, cultural practices and others. In establishing the context of the problem you also need to assign responsibility for the problem, respond to the question “what will happen if nothing is done?” and present a solution.

Data

Data is useful for illustrating the magnitude of a problem but sometimes figures put people off because they may be difficult to interpret or they may make a problem seem too large to tackle. Again, using the example of domestic violence, we may detail the numbers of cases reported or numbers of women affected, but these figures have to be combined with narrative in order for people to understand what the figures mean and the cost to society of ignoring the problem.

Messengers

The choice of spokesperson for your message when reframing an issue must be made carefully so that there is no mismatch between the message and the messenger. The public is likely to be more willing to listen to someone they believe is credible and has the knowledge and expertise on the issue than a popular public



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figure. They may also mistrust certain spokespersons if they think they have a vested personal interest in the advocacy campaign or “extreme” views on the subject. You may want to consider unlikely allies.

Visuals

Selection and use of imagery can reinforce or undermine your message. The traditional use of video or still images of wife battering or a bruised and bleeding battered woman, for example, can have the effect of making it appear as a personal rather than a public problem, reinforce stereotypes or lead the public to see the problem as a hopeless because the visual does not provide solutions.

Rather select images that suggest the public nature of the problem and which demonstrate cause and effect. Even

the way you place the picture can make a difference to how it is perceived in relation to your message.

Play with the layout of your images and see where the placement has the greatest impact in illustrating your message.

Tone

It is better to have a “reasonable” tone for your message. This is more likely to open people up to your ideas than a “rhetorical” tone, which raises images of partisan politics in most people’s minds and can lead them to dismiss your message.

A reasonable tone will encourage people to think about the problem and the solution rather than whether the spokesperson has a hidden agenda. A reasonable tone requires that you focus on the policy or action that is a part

of the identified problem and not on individuals; on solutions rather than problems; and on how it violates fundamental principles that people hold.

Metaphors

Metaphors are useful for simplifying an idea so the public can easily visualise and identify with it. An example is the commonly used and graphic metaphor of planeloads of passengers, as in “the numbers of women who die in Africa each year as a result of childbirth related complications is equivalent to X numbers of full passenger plane crashes”.

Information used for developing this toolsheet was sourced from Frameworks Institute, Framing Public Issues, 2005, Washington, DC 20006, www.frameworksinstitute.org