

## CHAPTER 8

# Advocacy Campaigns and Message Construction

*I am now on my first International Speaking Tour. . . . I talk about how kids can . . . get involved in projects . . . important to them, because this planet is not a place kids will inherit at some point far off in the distant future, we live here now, we share this planet already.*

—Milo Cress, age 12 (2013, para. 1–4)

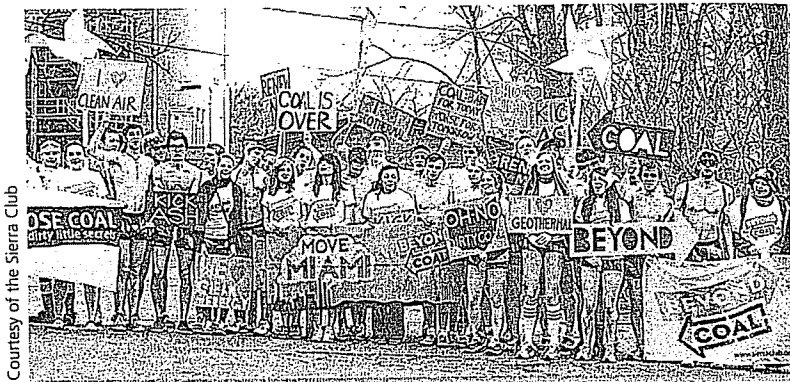
**T**he Be Straw Free campaign illustrates a form of environmental communication called *advocacy*, the act of persuading or arguing in support of a specific cause, policy, idea, or set of values. The campaign urges us to stop using plastic straws in order to reduce unnecessary waste and pollution. Milo Cress started it in 2011 when he was 11 years old. Now, it's an international campaign, changing the behaviors of thousands of people across the world.<sup>1</sup>

Campaigns are just one form of advocacy used by businesses, candidates for public office, public relations firms, environmental groups, and more. Advocacy takes many forms, including advertising, political campaigning, community organizing, marches and demonstrations, legal argument, and so forth. In this chapter, however, we focus on one significant form of advocacy—the *environmental advocacy campaign*.

### Chapter Preview

- In the first section of this chapter, we describe *advocacy* in general and distinguish *advocacy campaigns* and *critical rhetorics*, the questioning or criticism of the status quo.
- In the second section, we explore the basic elements of advocacy campaigns, focusing on (a) objectives, (b) audiences, and (c) strategies.

(Continued)



Courtesy of the Sierra Club

Advocacy campaigns are a uniquely democratic form of communication, offering a collective voice for those who wish to influence decision makers. The Sierra Student Coalition's Coal Free campaign is mobilizing students across the United States to persuade their boards of trustees and university presidents to move away from coal as a source of energy on their campuses and toward renewable energy.

(Continued)

- We go behind the scenes in the third section by describing the design of a successful advocacy campaign—the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition’s campaign against plans to strip-mine for coal near sacred Native American lands.
- In the final section, we describe the role of *message construction* in campaigns and identify two challenges: (1) overcoming the *attitude-behavior gap* and (2) the use of values in the construction of messages that seek to motivate supporters.

Our hope is that, when you have finished this chapter, you’ll be more aware of the wide range of communication practices that environmental advocates engage in and that you’ll also appreciate the rhetorical constraints they face in building public demand for, and winning, environmental protection.

## Environmental Advocacy

Advocacy is a powerful tool for a wide range of social change organizations. Groups—whose goals range from educational awareness about the significance of recycling to demands for compensation for small island nations most immediately and dramatically affected by climate change—constitute public forums and avenues of action for diverse voices and concerns. Such collectives of people seek to hold more powerful institutions accountable to democratic and humane principles and often achieve changes that protect more vulnerable populations and public interests.

Advocacy groups often act as intermediaries between grassroots individuals and the large, often impersonal institutions of public life. This position has been particularly true of environmental groups. Former *New York Times* writer Philip Shabecoff (2000) argues that a chief role of environmental groups is to act as “intermediaries between science and the public, the media, and lawmakers” (p. 152). For example, the Sierra Student Coalition’s Beyond Coal campaign (opening photo) has successfully served this intermediary role on many campuses. On campuses where we have worked—Indiana University and the University of North Carolina—student groups drew on the knowledge of faculty, physical plant workers, and alumni to emphasize the public health, environmental, and economic costs of relying on campus coal-burning power plants, as well as the option of renewable energy sources. As intermediaries, these small numbers of students enabled other students to gain expertise and to express their concerns. In both cases, they succeeded in persuading university officials to commit to retiring our campuses’ reliance on our on-campus coal plants.<sup>2</sup>

### Modes of Environmental Advocacy

Environmentalists engage in a wide variety of advocacy. Advocates may differ in their goals, the media they use, and the audiences they target. Types of advocacy include public education, community organizing, lobbying campaigns, boycotts, direct action protests such as sit-ins, and more. (See Table 8.1.) Here and in following chapters, we

**Table 8.1** Modes of Environmental Advocacy Campaigns

Mode of Advocacy	Objective
<i>Official Political and Legal Channels:</i>	
1. Legislation	To influence laws or regulations
2. Litigation	To seek compliance with environmental standards by agencies and businesses
3. Electoral politics	To mobilize voters for candidates and referenda
<i>Public Awareness Campaigns and Actions:</i>	
4. Critical rhetoric	Questioning or criticism of a behavior, policy, societal value, or ideology
5. Public education	To influence societal attitudes and behavior
6. Direct action	To influence specific behaviors through acts of protest, including civil disobedience
7. Media events	To create publicity or news coverage to broaden advocacy effects
8. Community organizing	To mobilize citizens or residents to act
<i>Consumer Appeals and the Market:</i>	
9. Green consumerism	To use consumers’ purchasing power to influence corporate behavior
10. Corporate accountability	To influence corporate behavior through consumer boycotts and shareholder actions

describe some of these modes of advocacy in more detail. For now, we describe two broad forms of advocacy: advocacy campaigns and critical rhetoric.

### Campaigns Differ From Critical Rhetoric

Before an environmental advocacy campaign starts, there is often a period in which the status quo is questioned and a desire to find a better way is expressed. This is the role of *critical rhetoric*. Although they are different in some ways, campaigns and critical rhetorics can function in complementary ways, and it is therefore important to understand each of these modes of advocacy in more detail.

#### *Critical Rhetoric*

**Critical rhetoric** is the questioning or criticism of a behavior, policy, societal value, or ideology. Such rhetoric may also include the articulation of an alternate policy, vision, or ideology. Throughout the modern environmental movement, many

voices have questioned or criticized the taken-for-granted views of culture. For example, Rachel Carson's (1962) classic book *Silent Spring* sharply criticized the practices of the pesticide industry and government agencies that exposed the public to harmful chemicals. Other voices have urged an alternative vision of society. A report by the UK World Wildlife Fund envisions that "by 2050, power, transport, industrial and domestic energy needs could be met overwhelmingly from renewable sources" (WWF, 2011, para. 3).

Many consider the global Occupy Movement, which reached its initial peak in 2011, an exemplar of critical rhetoric. Occupy named the majority of the world as a united 99% that needs to demand accountability from the 1% of elites. Although this critique is not a concrete success (such as campaign finance reform or an end to predatory loans for higher education), many believe the fact that we can say "99%" and that most people know what we are referencing when we do so is a symbolic achievement of collective imagination, through which new political alliances and actions might emerge. As a result, critical rhetorics frequently serve not only to question taken-for-granted realities but also expand the range of visions that are eclipsed in the day-to-day political struggles of a campaign.

### Advocacy Campaigns

Although campaigns also advocate social change, they differ from critical rhetorics. Most important, campaigns are organized around concrete actions that move us closer to larger goals. In this sense, an advocacy campaign can be defined broadly as



Courtesy of Greenpeace

Photo 8.1

Greenpeace International declared a campaign victory in 2013 when Japan's top casual wear clothing brand, Uniqlo, committed "to eliminate all releases of hazardous chemicals throughout its entire global supply chain and products by 2020." Although other brands such as Levi's and Esprit have made similar commitments, the campaign continues to focus on brands such as GAP and Calvin Klein.

a strategic course of action, involving communication, which is undertaken for a specific purpose or objective. A campaign is waged to win a victory or secure a specific outcome; it, therefore, goes beyond the questioning or criticism of a policy or societal value. This is an important point. For example, local citizens might criticize plans to build a toxic waste landfill in their neighborhood. A campaign, however, will go further; it might pursue the objective of blocking a permit for the construction of the landfill by organizing local residents, businesses, and church and synagogue leaders to call, visit, and lobby city council members who have the power to decide for or against the landfill's permit.

Advocacy campaigns draw upon several of the advocacy modes listed in Table 8.1. For example, many environmental advocacy campaigns will involve legislative and electoral politics; they also might engage in public education, community organizing, and corporate accountability campaigns. Overall, a campaign may rely on multiple forms of advocacy as part of a strategic and time-limited course of action for a specific purpose.

In contemporary society, advocacy campaigns are used by many groups for a range of purposes. In information and behavior-change campaigns, for example, the campaign form is used, among other purposes, to reduce underage smoking and to encourage drivers to conserve energy by properly inflating their tires. Environmental advocacy campaigns share some characteristics of these information and behavior-change campaigns, and it is important to recognize these similarities before looking at their differences.



### Features of Campaigns

In their classic study of campaigns, Everett Rogers and Douglas Storey (1987) identified four features shared by most campaigns:

1. A campaign is purposeful. That is, "specific outcomes are intended to result from the communication efforts of a campaign" (p. 818).
2. A campaign is aimed at a large audience. A campaign's purpose usually requires an organized effort going beyond communication with just one or a few people; it aims to persuade enough people to make a difference.
3. A campaign often has a specifically defined time limit. The desired outcome of a campaign—a vote or passage of a law, for example—must be achieved by some deadline, when the window for any further action will close.
4. A campaign involves an organized set of communication activities. These activities are particularly evident in construction of the campaign's message and in efforts to educate and/or mobilize different constituencies.

SOURCE: Everett M. Rogers & Douglas D. Storey, "Communication Campaigns," in C. R. Berger & S. H. Chaffee (Eds.), *Handbook of Communication Science* (pp. 817–846). Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1987.

Although they share features with information and behavior-change campaigns, environmental advocacy campaigns differ from them in basic ways. Two differences in particular stand out.

First, access to decision-making power and resources differ due to those who lead the campaigns. Most information and behavior-change campaigns aim to reduce risk or influence individual behavior and are *institutionally sponsored by a legally recognized, centralized entity*; that is, they are initiated by a government health agency, a university, or a company targeting individuals (like students or employees). Environmental advocacy campaigns, on the other hand, usually are waged by people and/or organizations that exist outside of state or corporate institutions—concerned individuals, environmental organizations, or small community action groups, for example.

Second, the type of change encouraged tends to differ. That is, most public health information and behavior-change campaigns seek to *modify individuals' choices about their personal lifestyles*, such as drug use or car maintenance practices. These changes usually do not require the sponsoring entity to undergo broader changes in laws or corporate practices, other than perhaps adding signage to designate smoking areas or remind people not to idle in their cars or to turn off the lights when they leave a room. Most environmental advocacy campaigns, on the other hand, seek to change something beyond one's personal lifestyle through *external conditions*—for example, the closing of a coal plant or the cleanup of an abandoned toxic waste site—or more *systemic change*, that is, alter the policies or practices of a governmental or corporate body to provide health care for all or build affordable public transportation.

These distinctions are not to say there is no overlap. The Be Straw Free Campaign mentioned at the beginning of this chapter highlights how personal behavior choice campaigns can be launched by individuals who then push for systemic changes in the restaurant industry and beyond. Communication scholars and practitioners, however, must be aware of who is launching any given campaign, and for what ends, in order to provide useful analysis or ideas.

From our own experiences in the U.S. environmental movement, we've been convinced that while information and behavior-change campaigns can make a difference, advocacy campaigns also are important in shaping public debate and civic decisions about environmental policy and practices that exceed the impact of individual choices. Therefore, in the following sections, we describe, in more detail, the basic design that many advocacy campaigns use and also provide more examples of successful campaigns.

## Environmental Advocacy Campaigns

By the time of the first Earth Day in 1970, the ecology movement had begun to change the way citizens communicated with public officials about the environment. Not content to rely simply on magazine articles or nature programs on television to educate the public, many environmental groups began to design advocacy campaigns to achieve specific changes. One architect of this new strategy was Michael McCloskey,

the former executive director of the Sierra Club. In an interview, McCloskey reflected on his role in the environmental movement's turn to campaigns:

What I have emphasized has been a serious approach toward achieving our ends. I thought that we were not here just to bear witness or to pledge allegiance to the faith, but in fact we were here to bring that faith into reality. . . . That means we could not rest content with having said the right things . . . but we also had to plan to achieve them. We had to know how the political system worked, how to identify the decision makers. . . . We had to have people concerned with all the practical details of getting our programs accomplished. (Gendlin, 1982, p. 41)

The shift described by McCloskey echoes the basic difference between critical rhetoric and campaigns—between “saying the right things” and having a “plan to achieve them.” A *plan* means that advocates must ask, “What do we need to do to implement a strategic course of action, involving communication, to achieve our purpose?” From our observations of successful campaigns,<sup>1</sup> we've found that environmental leaders usually ask themselves three basic questions:

1. What exactly does the campaign want to accomplish?
2. Which decision makers have the ability to respond?
3. What will persuade these decision makers to act on the campaign's objectives?

These three questions ask, respectively, about a campaign's (1) objectives, (2) audiences, and (3) strategies. (We discuss each of these questions below.)

In answering these questions, campaigns also pursue important **communication tasks**. Campaigns, for example, must compose persuasive messages to win public support for their objectives; in doing this, campaigns strive to mobilize this support from constituencies (audiences) relevant to their strategy for influencing key decision makers. Of course, it is important to be aware that campaigns take place in the context of other, competing voices and countercampaigns. Successful campaigns adapt to these challenges in what is often an ever-changing communication environment.

In the remainder of this section, we describe the basic questions and corresponding communication tasks that advocacy campaigns confront. (See Figure 8.1 for a model of the advocacy campaign.)

### Campaigns' Objectives

Successful advocacy campaigns require a clear-eyed focus on a concrete objective. For example, John Muir's preservation campaign to protect Yosemite Valley (Chapter 2) focused on the passage of a single piece of legislation in the U.S. Congress in 1890 that designated the mountains around Yosemite Valley as a National Park. Therefore, the first question environmental advocates face in designing a campaign is about the group's objectives. It asks, “*What exactly does the campaign want to accomplish?*”

### Goals Versus Objectives

Campaigns flounder when their objectives are unclear or when they confuse a broad goal or vision with near-term, achievable, and specific actions or decisions. It is one thing to declare, "The world should protect old-growth forests," and quite another to mobilize relevant constituencies to persuade the relevant government agency in, for example, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Russia, or elsewhere, to issue an official ruling to halt the building of roads into these specific native forests. (Roads give access to commercial logging operations.) While halting roads in a specific forest contributes to the broader goal of protecting global old-growth forests, it is important to distinguish a campaign's need to focus on this specific *objective* from the broader effort that would presumably be needed to protect the remaining old-growth areas.

What, then, does it mean to answer the first question, "What exactly does the campaign want to accomplish?" First, it is important to distinguish between a campaign's long-term *goals* and its specific *objectives*. As it is used here, the term *goal* refers to a long-term vision or value, such as the desire to protect old-growth forests, reduce arsenic in drinking water, or reduce the levels of greenhouse gases entering the atmosphere. Critical rhetorics are often important in articulating these broader visions, but they are not campaigns.

On the other hand, the term *objective* refers to a specific action, event, or decision that moves a campaign closer to its broader goal. An objective is a concrete and

time-limited decision or action. For example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can issue a regulation imposing stricter limits on the number of parts per billion of arsenic allowed in drinking water. That's why the emphasis in this first question is to ask, "What *exactly* do you want?"

Most successful campaigns answer this question by identifying an objective that is a concrete, specific, and time-limited action or decision. Typical objectives from past campaigns have included the passage of a referendum in support of clean water bonds, a city council's vote for a zoning ordinance that banned hazardous waste facilities within 10 miles of a school, and a state utility commission's decision to deny a permit for a coal-burning power plant. Each of these objectives—once achieved—furthered a broader goal but, in themselves, were concrete, achievable decisions or actions.

### Identifying Key Decision Makers

Once an advocacy campaign decides what exactly it wants to achieve, it must ask, "Which decision makers have the ability to respond?" In answering this, campaign organizers succeed when they identify (and develop a strategy to influence) relevant decision makers, for example, a governmental agency, legislative body, university's Board of Trustees, business leaders, or other responsible parties who have the authority to act on the campaign's objectives.

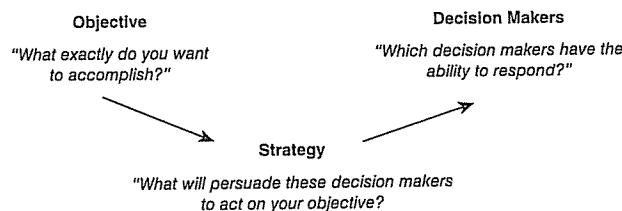
### Primary Versus Secondary Audiences

In identifying a relevant decision maker, successful campaigns seek to distinguish two types of audiences: (1) the **primary audience** is the decision maker who has the authority to act or implement the objectives of a campaign and (2) **secondary audiences** (also called *public audiences*) are the various segments of the public, supporters, coalition partners, opinion leaders, and news media; the support of these constituencies is often pivotal in holding a primary audience or decision maker accountable for the campaign's objectives.

A campaign cannot achieve an objective until someone with the ability or authority to decide on the objective responds favorably. This decision maker is a campaign's primary audience. For example, if the campaign's objective is to prohibit flashing (digital) billboards along state highways, then the primary audience is most likely to be the members of the state legislature's budget or commerce committee. On the other hand, if a campaign wants tighter regulation of emissions of mercury from coal-burning power plants, then the primary audience will be the EPA, which administers the Clean Air Act.

### Developing a Strategy to Influence Decision Makers

The third question a campaign asks, therefore, is, "What will persuade these decision makers to act on the group's objective?" This is a quintessential question about strategy. Strategy can be a surprisingly slippery concept and it is often confused with a campaign's tactics, so let's look more closely at this term.



#### Communication Tasks

- (1) Compose a campaign "message" and other communication materials (press release, media ads, etc.)
- (2) Identify relevant audiences and adapt message and materials to each:
  - Mobilize the base (supporters)
  - Convince "persuadables"
  - Recruit opinion leaders and media (news stories)

NOTE: Campaigns are time-limited actions that unfold in the context of other, competing voices and countermessages.



Figure 8.1 Design of the Environmental Advocacy Campaign

### Strategy Versus Tactics

Environmental educator David Orr (1992) once said that questions about strategy land us squarely in the realm of *praxis*, the study of efficient action or the best means to achieve an objective. In communication studies, we further emphasize the importance of critical theory to this study and define *praxis* as an ongoing process of critical theoretical reflection and embodied action in which the two inform each other in order to provide further insight and practice that may improve the world within specific contexts. Whereas critical rhetorics may help us to imagine a desired future, an advocacy campaign goes further and asks, "How do we actually get to this future?" "And how can reflection on previous action and theory help us achieve our goals?" Answering this is the heart of strategy.

The idea of strategy can be confusing, so it might be best to begin with a definition and an example. Simply defined, a strategy is a critical source of influence or *leverage* that, if fully implemented, is able to persuade a primary decision maker to act on a campaign's objective. *Leverage* often is said to arise from Archimedes' famous claim, "Given me a place to stand and a lever long enough, and I will move the world," that is, "the application of a certain kind of action (assuming 'a place to stand') produces a dynamic that can move—or leverage—a much larger force [emphasis added]" (Cox, 2010, p. 128). Sometimes, specific actions—signing a petition, protests, and so forth—are mistaken for strategy. These are usually what are called *tactics*, not the wider leverage or influence that a campaign may be exerting by using these tactics. Tactics are concrete acts that carry out or implement the broader strategy.

A much-studied example of a strategy is the leverage used by environmental and health groups to persuade the multinational fast-food chain McDonald's to change its food purchasing policies. In 2003, McDonald's acknowledged that the use of growth-stimulating antibiotics by large factory farms that raise and sell poultry and beef threatened human health. Many scientists believe that the "indiscriminate use of antibiotics in cows, pigs and chickens raised for meat . . . has endangered human health by fueling the growing epidemic of antibiotic resistance" (Tavernise, 2013, p. A1). In its announcement, McDonald's agreed to phase out its purchase of chickens injected with such growth hormones; this, in turn, added pressure on the poultry industry to begin to change its practices<sup>3</sup> (Greider, 2003; see also Strom, 2014). What, then, influenced McDonald's to institute this change?

#### Strategy as Leverage: Influencing McDonald's

In the McDonald's case, a coalition of 13 environmental, religious, and public health organizations, including Environmental Defense, the Humane Society, and National Catholic Rural Life Conference, decided a creative use of market forces might be a source of influence or leverage on McDonald's purchasing practices. This strategy drew on the power of consumers to change industry behavior "not by one purchase at a time, but on a grand scale by *targeting large brands in the middleman position* [emphasis added]" (Greider, 2003, p. 8). That is, their campaign chose to

influence the behavior of the meat industry by targeting one of the largest purchasers of its products: McDonald's.

Journalist William Greider closely studied the innovative strategy used in the McDonald's campaign. "What has changed [in the case of McDonald's] is an essential strategic insight" (p. 10). Greider explained,

Consumers are in a weak position and have very little actual leverage over the content of what they buy or how it is produced. . . . Instead of browbeating individual consumers, new reform campaigns focus on the structure of industry itself and attempt to leverage entire sectors. The activists identify and target the larger corporate "consumers" who buy an industrial sector's output and sell it at retail under popular brand names. They can't stand the heat so easily, since they regularly proclaim that the customer is king. When one of these big names folds to consumer pressure, it sends a tremor through the supplier base, much as McDonald's has. (2003, p. 10)

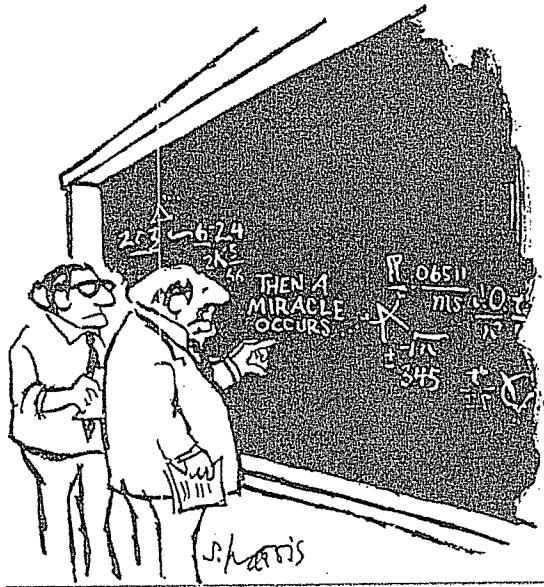
In the McDonald's campaign, the strategy sought to use the purchasing power of the fast-food giant itself rather than individual customers to influence the poultry industry. By linking the familiar brand and logo of this global icon in the public's mind with health risks from growth hormones in its food, the campaign was able to leverage the buying power of McDonald's to influence the behavior of its suppliers. If the factory farms that sold meat products to McDonald's wanted to continue to do business, they would have to reduce their use of growth hormones in poultry and perhaps in other animals as well.

The campaign to influence McDonald's, and thereby the poultry industry, illustrates the difference between strategy and tactics. In this case, strategy, as a source of influence or leverage, was the use of a powerful corporation's brand and buying power to affect the poultry industry's use of growth hormones in chickens. The tactics that carried out this strategy included the materials distributed to McDonald's, meetings with company officials, organizing of protests outside McDonald's restaurants, and so forth. Each of these was important, but their critical function was to implement the wider strategy—using the vulnerability of McDonald's brand to public pressure and, subsequently, its purchasing power to affect changes in the meat industry. (We define and discuss boycott campaigns and corporate accountability more in Chapter 11.)

For now, we want to emphasize that strategy is easy to overlook or not be clearly understood in designing a campaign. When it is unclear, a campaign usually suffers as a result. In his discussion of this problem, Orr (1992) recalled the cartoon shown in Photo 8.2, which appeared in the journal *American Scientist*. The cartoon shows a scientist who, in balancing an equation, has inserted this curious step: "then a miracle occurs." Orr observed, "Most strategies of social change have similar dependence on the miraculous" (p. 61).

Political theorist Douglas Torgerson (1999) has claimed that a dependence on the miraculous is particularly true of environmental strategies. He argued that a simple,

Reprinted with permission from Sidney Harris, © www.ScienceCartoonsPlus.com



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Photo 32

"A miracle needed?" Campaigns often fail when they overlook the important step of identifying a viable strategy for influencing key decision makers.

although cynical assumption sometimes underlies green strategic thought: "Environmental problems are sure to get worse . . . and when they do, more and more people will be moved to join the green cause, thus enhancing its power and its chance of making a real difference" (p. 22). Torgerson believed that such an assumption borders on belief in the miraculous. We agree. Environmental campaigns more often succeed when they identify a source of influence that is able to affect a larger power or decision maker. Exercising that leverage, rather than waiting for a miracle, is the meaning of strategy.

### A Campaign's Communication Tasks

Earlier, we defined an advocacy campaign as a strategic course of action, *involving communication*, that is undertaken for a specific purpose. It's good to remember that, in answering the questions about objectives, decision makers, and strategy, a campaign is also engaged in several important communication decisions and tasks. Campaigns not only must articulate a clear objective—*what exactly does it wish to*

*achieve*—but compose persuasive messages and content, carefully target which medium to use, adapt to key audiences, and more. We explore examples of these communication choices later in this and subsequent chapters. For now, let's look at two critical communication tasks for advocacy campaigns: mobilizing key audiences or constituencies and constructing a "message."

### Mobilizing Constituencies

In designing a strategy, campaigns often need the support of others—media professionals, opinion leaders, community members, and more—who can exert influence on the primary audience to act on the campaign's objective. The ability to fulfill this task assumes that decision makers, in fact, are ultimately accountable to voters, the media, or other groups. (This assumption goes to the heart of democratic politics and is, itself, a subject of much debate.) Let's look at this task more closely.

In mobilizing the support of others, it is useful, first, to distinguish between the media and opinion leaders, on one hand, and members of the general public, on the other. **Opinion leaders** are those persons whose statements are influential with the media and members of the primary audience. For example, the Natural Resources Defense Council relies upon well-known figures like environmentalist Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and actors Robert Redford or Leonardo DiCaprio as spokespersons, while a smaller, local environmental group may turn to a respected member of that community—a well-respected business owner or local sports star—to speak for the group publicly. Reporters are more likely to quote such opinion leaders in covering a story than ordinary citizens. And, as we saw in our discussion of "agenda setting" (Chapter 5), media coverage of a group's campaign may help to raise the salience or importance of an issue in the eyes of potential decision makers.

When environmental advocacy groups turn to the general public sphere, they confront three very different types of audiences: (1) the campaign's **base** (its core supporters and potential coalition partners), (2) **opponents** (those who strongly disagree and are unlikely to be persuaded), and (3) **persuadables** (members of the public who are undecided but potentially sympathetic to a campaign's objectives). Normally, a campaign does not try to persuade its opponents, since they are committed already to their own objectives. Instead, persuadables often constitute the heart of a campaign's communication because their support often makes the difference in the outcome of the campaign.

It's important to note that, although persuadables may be potential supporters of a campaign, they are usually undecided or unaware, at first, of a campaign's objectives. This was true with the Beyond Coal campaign. As noted earlier, this campaign aimed to close coal-burning power plants, due to their harmful air pollution as well as emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), a leading cause of climate change. Campaign persuadables (students, parents, and others living in communities near the power plants) were initially unaware of the impacts of coal plant emissions on either climate change or their families' health, including mercury poisoning and childhood asthma. Nevertheless, the Beyond Coal campaign has viewed them as potentially

open to information about these impacts; as a result, it has succeeded in many cases in mobilizing area residents to attend and speak at public hearings about the risks from these power plants.

### *A Campaign's Message*

Both in mobilizing supporters and communicating its objective to decision makers, an advocacy campaign is challenged to create appropriate educational and persuasive content. A particularly important element of a campaign's strategic communication is its message. As developed by many advocacy groups, a message is usually a phrase or sentence that concisely expresses a campaign's objective and the values at stake in the goals it seeks. Although campaigns have much information and develop a range of arguments, the message itself is usually short, compelling, and memorable. It accompanies all of a campaign's communication materials, from posters to radio ads to websites. Let's look at two examples of compelling advocacy campaign messages.

First, a number of civil society groups in the United States, Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa have joined together in a "Water Is Life" campaign (<http://waterislife.com>). The advocacy campaign brings clean drinking water and sanitation to those in need in developing countries. By explicitly identifying water with the core value of *life*, the campaign's message signals the urgency of the campaign's advocacy work for many people, animals, and habitats in drought-prone areas. And a second, classic message is "Extinction Is Forever." The message was composed many years ago by the Center for Environmental Education (n.d.) for its campaign for a ban on the commercial hunting of whales—many species were nearing extinction—and it has since been adopted by other groups that campaign to protect endangered species. The message appeals to a sense of the *irreparable*, that is, a warning to act before it is too late or a feeling that, once something of value is lost, it cannot be recovered (Cox, 2001a). "Extinction Is Forever," therefore, evokes powerful feelings about mortality and life itself.

Messages are only one part of a campaign's communication, but they serve an important purpose. They summarize a campaign's objective, state its core values, and provide a frame for understanding and reception of the details of its other informational materials. In developing messages, campaigns attempt to identify values and language that resonate with their base and persuadables—those who may be sympathetic to the campaign's objectives, but are undecided. Because messages are so important to environmental advocacy campaigns, we return to this topic and the role of values in mobilizing supporters later in this chapter.

#### **Evaluating an Environmental Advocacy Campaign**

How do we know if a campaign is likely to succeed, or later, why it succeeded? Or, for campaigns that failed, what went wrong? Here are some of the basic questions that may explain why a campaign succeeded or failed to achieve its objective:

#### *Questions about a campaign's basic design:*

- Did the campaign identify a clear *objective*? What specific action or decision was required?
- Did the campaign identify a relevant *decision maker*, i.e., someone or group that had the ability to act on the campaign's objective?
- Did the campaign develop a realistic *strategy*, i.e., a source of influence or leverage, able to persuade the decision maker?

#### *Questions about a campaign's communication tasks:*

- Did the campaign compose and consistently use a compelling *message* in all of its communication?
- Did this message clearly convey the campaign's core value or objective?
- Did the campaign mobilize its *base* of supporters? Relevant opinion leaders and media?
- Did the campaign identify key *values* in its message and appeals, able to convince "persuadable" audiences and motivate them to act?

In summary, advocacy campaigns usually succeed by identifying a concrete, achievable objective, a decision maker able to respond, and a strategy for influencing this decision maker, along with constructing a compelling message and other content to mobilize the support of relevant constituencies. When environmental advocacy campaigns are designed well, they have several advantages over isolated protests or critical rhetorics:

- By planning a strategic course of action over time, advocacy campaigns increase the chances of reaching more people in the public sphere to help achieve their objectives.
- Advocacy campaigns draw on the collective strength of people and resources for both planning and implementing a course of action, which tends to have a greater impact on public life than what one person can do alone.
- Advocacy campaigns serve as intermediaries between individuals in their private lives and the large, often impersonal, institutions of public life, which forms the basis for democratic social change.

Each of these strengths of an advocacy campaign can be illustrated by looking at a successful campaign in more depth.

## **The Campaign to Protect Zuni Salt Lake**

On August 4, 2003, the Salt River Project (SRP), third-largest electric power company in the United States, cancelled its plans for a coal strip-mine near the Zuni Salt Lake in western New Mexico. The company's announcement was a victory for a coalition of Native American tribes, environmental and religious groups, and the Zuni people themselves who waged a multiyear campaign to protect the sacred Zuni Salt Lake and surrounding lands from mining and other environmental threats.



We use this example because it clearly illustrates the three core elements of design that advocacy campaigns must consider: (1) a clear *objective*, (2) a clearly identified *decision maker*, and (3) a *strategy* to persuade the primary decision maker to act on this objective. The Zuni Salt Lake campaign also illustrates the ability of a small group, working with allies and coalition partners, to use the principles of an advocacy campaign to achieve an important objective—safeguarding a sacred tribal site.

### Zuni Salt Lake and a Coal Mine

SRP company's plans called for strip-mining more than 80 million tons of coal from 18,000 acres of federal, state, and private lands. (Strip-mining is the removal of surface land to expose the underlying mineral seams.) To settle the coal dust from such mining, SRP planned to pump 85 gallons of water per minute from underground aquifers (Valtin, 2003). The New Mexico Department of Energy, Minerals, and Natural Resources had granted permits for the company to begin construction of the mine in 1996, although work did not immediately begin. By June 22, 2001, opposition to the mine had grown.

To the Zunis and area tribes, the Salt Lake is sacred. It is home to the Zunis' deity *Ma'l Oyattsik'i*, the Salt Mother, who, Zunis believe, has provided salt for centuries for tribal religious ceremonies. (In dry season, the water evaporates, leaving behind salt flats, the source of salt for Zunis and neighboring tribes.)

The region surrounding Zuni Salt Lake is known as the Sanctuary or *A:shiwí A:wán Ma'kyaya dap aníullapna Dekohannan Dehyakya Dehwanne*. It has burial grounds and other sacred sites and is laced with trails that are used by the Zunis, Navajos, Acomas, Hopis, Lagunas, Apaches, and other Southwestern tribes to reach the Zuni Salt Lake. By tradition, the Sanctuary is a neutral zone where warring tribes put their weapons down and share in the gathering of "the salt which embodies the flesh of the Salt Mother herself" (Sacred Land Film Project, 2003, p. 1).

The strip-mine would have been located in the heart of the Sanctuary, 10 miles from Zuni Salt Lake. Although the mine itself would not be on Zuni land, tribal leaders feared that the company's plans to pump large volumes of groundwater from the same desert aquifer that feeds the Salt Lake would dry up the lake. Malcolm Bowekaty, former Zuni Pueblo governor, told reporters, "If they vent a lot of pressure that's forcing the water up, we will no longer have the salt" (Valtin, 2003, p. 3).

### A Coalition's Campaign

By 2001, Zuni leaders had assembled a coalition that began working together to protect Zuni Salt Lake and the Sanctuary. For two days, the group met informally in the kitchen of a Zuni leader to design a two-year advocacy campaign plan.<sup>4</sup> On November 30, 2001, leaders from the Zuni tribe, Water Information Network, Center for Biological Diversity, Citizens Coal Council, Tonatierra (an indigenous group), Friends of the Earth, Sierra Club, and Seventh Generation Fund for Indian

Development publicly announced the formation of the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition. In what follows, we describe how this campaign embodied the core elements of an advocacy campaign.

### Campaign Objectives

From the beginning, the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition saw its goal to "get SRP to drop its plans for the Fence Lake Coal Mine [and] protect Zuni Salt Lake for the long-term" (Zuni Salt Lake Coalition, 2001). More immediately, coalition planners faced the prospect of SRP's imminent preparation of the mine site, including plans to drill into the Dakota Aquifer, which fed Zuni Salt Lake.

Therefore, the coalition identified two immediate, more specific *objectives*: (1) "make sure that SRP does not tap Dakota Aquifer" and (2) persuade the State of New Mexico and the Department of the Interior to deny the permits needed to open the coal mine. If these permits were granted, then the objective would be to appeal these decisions in order to delay actual construction of the mine (Zuni Salt Lake Coalition, 2001). Coalition members believed that, if they could achieve either one of these objectives, they would succeed in persuading SRP to cancel its plans for the project.

### Identifying Key Decision Makers

The Zuni Salt Lake Coalition identified two sets of primary decision makers. Ultimately, they sought to persuade SRP officials to withdraw plans for the coal mine. Related to this goal and the campaign's two more concrete objectives, the coalition targeted the U.S. Department of the Interior and the officials in New Mexico who oversaw the state's permitting process.

### Strategy: Influencing the Primary Decision Makers

Given its goal to persuade SRP officials to withdraw their plans for the mine, the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition decided the best strategy would be to raise the costs to the company as it pursued permits for the mine. At its very first meeting, the coalition pledged to hold SRP accountable by making "it so hard for them [SRP officials] that they want to drop it. Make them feel that the Fence Lake project is a fruitless effort" (Zuni Salt Lake Coalition, 2001). This core strategy—raising the costs (in time and money) to SRP—would guide subsequent decisions and activities of the coalition.

Specifically, the coalition sought ways to influence SRP and federal officials responsible for issuing the mine's permits (a) by introducing scientific evidence of the ecological effects on Zuni Salt Lake of pumping water from the aquifer and (b) by launching an aggressive outreach to opinion leaders, news media, and New Mexico public officials. (We return to this second, outreach strategy in a moment.) By organizing around these actions, the coalition intended to place continual roadblocks in SRP's path and thereby raise the costs to SRP, increasing pressure on the company to cancel its plans for the coal mine.

The first element of the coalition's strategy was to introduce evidence of environmental damage to Zuni Salt Lake as a basis for challenging the state and federal permits that had been issued.<sup>2</sup> New research was a critical part of the effort to hold the Department of Interior accountable under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirement for an environmental impact statement. (We describe the importance of NEPA in Chapter 12.) For example, the coalition argued that "every hydrological study, except SRP's own, shows that this pumping will detrimentally affect the lake" (Zuni Salt Lake Coalition, 2003). Based on its hydrological information (pumping tests), the coalition requested that Interior conduct a supplemental environmental impact study. Similarly, it appealed the state's water permit pending completion of further pumping tests on the aquifer.

Finally, the coalition's threat to file a challenge in the event that Interior failed to consider possible impacts of pumping water from the underground aquifers promised to add delay, and therefore more costs, to SRP's plans to start construction of the coal mine.

#### *Mobilizing Support From Key Constituencies*

Also pivotal to the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition's strategy was its plan for an aggressive outreach to opinion leaders, news media, and New Mexico public officials in an effort to influence the primary decision makers. Influencing a powerful utility like SRP may seem unrealistic. SRP officials were not publicly elected; therefore, they were unaffected by voters. Nevertheless, the coalition believed that the company's credibility and ability to secure cooperation (including its permits) depended on a number of key constituencies, including public officials, opinion leaders, and the media; they believed further that some of these groups could be mobilized.

In implementing this outreach strategy, the coalition began with its base—the Zuni people themselves and their allies among area tribes. In addition, it sought to mobilize support from persuadable groups—area churches, environmental groups, and people of faith generally (Zuni Salt Lake Coalition, 2001). In turn, support from these groups ultimately attracted support from opinion leaders, the media, and, in the end, from elected officials.

An important rationale for the outreach strategy was also to respond to SRP's own public relations campaign. (Remember, campaigns unfold in the context of other, competing voices and counter-messages.) This strategy supplemented the coalition's work on the permits by keeping the threat to Zuni Salt Lake before the wider public.

At the heart of the outreach strategy were efforts to generate "lots of publicity" (Zuni Salt Lake Coalition, 2001). From 2001 to 2003, the Zuni Salt Lake campaign generated thousands of letters to allied groups, newspapers, and public officials. The coalition also publicized resolutions of support from tribal councils and from the New Mexico Conference of Churches, and it mounted two *fax attacks*—deluges of fax messages—on the Department of the Interior to urge delays in its approval of the permits.

In seeking "lots of publicity," the campaign also employed creative approaches for generating media coverage. Coalition organizer Andy Bessler explained,

Tribal members have a different approach, which made us think "outside the box." Where the Sierra Club might air a radio spot to convey our message, the Zuni suggested sending runners [from Zuni Pueblo to SRP's Phoenix headquarters]. And where we did run radio ads, we had scripts in English, Spanish, Zuni, Navajo, Hopi, and Apache so the spots could run on tribal radio stations as well as on mainstream stations in Phoenix and Albuquerque. (quoted in Valtin, 2003, p. 3)

Along with the use of traditional runners to generate media coverage, the coalition also scheduled a people's hearing on Zuni Salt Lake in Zuni Pueblo. The event included the showing of a video, updates on the campaign, and a public forum. Over 500 people attended and offered their own testimony. "At the conclusion of the hearing, the sky opened up and let loose a torrential downpour, which the Zuni took as a blessing from heaven" (Valtin, 2003, p. 1). Finally, the coalition won the National Trust for Historic Preservation's listing of the Zuni Salt Lake area as one of America's most endangered places ("Victory," 2003, p. 6).

In mobilizing these supporters, the coalition drew on several important sources for persuasion. Especially relevant to mobilizing its base and other key supporters, the coalition highlighted the spiritual and cultural values associated with the Zuni Salt Lake, the Zuni tribe's history, and the indigenous cultures of this region. Related to these values, the coalition spoke of the *irreparable* nature of the threats to the Zuni Salt Lake. (Earlier, we defined the irreparable as a warning to act before it is too late.) Such a warning implicitly invites an audience to feel that (a) something [the Zuni Salt Lake] is unique or rare and therefore of great value; (b) its existence is threatened or precarious; (c) its loss or destruction cannot be reversed; and, therefore, (d) action to protect it is timely or urgent.

The coalition's media materials reflected these persuasive appeals. For Southwest indigenous peoples, the Zuni Salt Lake and Sanctuary are very powerful places. Zuni Council Member Arden Kucate reminded the coalitions' supporters of these values when he warned of the challenge before them: "We have to start thinking in the traditional way. It is not the earth, it is Mother Earth. Zuni people will not sacrifice our Salt Woman for cheap coal to serve Arizona or California, because she is irreplaceable" (LaDuke, 2002).

Using its support from tribal councils, churches, opinion leaders, and other public constituencies, the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition succeeded in gaining the attention of news media and, ultimately, in enlisting the support of public officials in New Mexico. (We return to these developments.)

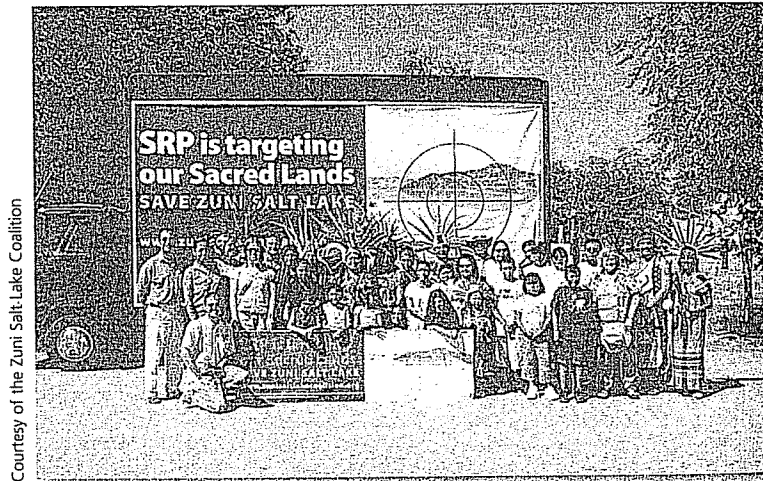
#### *Communication Message*

Finally, at the heart of all its communication, the coalition's campaign reiterated a memorable and compelling message: "SRP Is Targeting Our Sacred Lands. Save Zuni Salt Lake." This message combined a statement of threat—"Targeting Our Sacred

Lands”—and a call to action—“Save Zuni Salt Lake.” As a result, the message reinforced the sources for persuasion used by the coalition—the values associated with the Salt Lake and Zuni heritage, and the harm from strip-mining. For example, religious leaders sent postcards to the SRP president, emphasizing respect for sacred sites and the potentially irreparable danger to Zuni Salt Lake. The postcard read “People of faith don’t want any sacred areas to be desecrated by a strip mine . . . for cheap electricity from dirty coal: Not the Vatican, not Mecca, not Temple Square in Salt Lake City . . . and not Zuni Salt Lake.”

One of the creative ways the campaign kept its message before the public was a panel truck with the words, “SRP Is Targeting Our Sacred Lands. Save Zuni Salt Lake” prominently displayed on its side. (See Photo 8.2) The panel displayed a large photo of Zuni Salt Lake with a rifle’s crosshairs on it and, in large letters, the campaign’s message. Bessler recalled, “We drove the truck . . . all over Arizona and New Mexico to tribal pueblos, and we got a lot of people to sign petitions” (quoted in Valtin, 2003, p. 3).

The coalition’s effort to frame the news (Chapter 5) of the controversy as a struggle over spiritual and ecological values began to pay dividends. In July 2003, the entire U.S. Congressional delegation from New Mexico sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior, asking her to stop the mining permit until new studies of the aquifer could be completed. Their letter also made clear that they were planning to bring a lawsuit under NEPA if Interior officials refused to prepare a supplemental environmental impact statement. The prospect of a lengthy lawsuit threatened to delay SRP’s plans even further, continuing the campaign’s overall strategy of making it “so hard for them that they want to drop” plans for the strip-mine.



Courtesy of the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition

Photo 8.2

Members of the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition pose beside the mobile billboard truck used in their campaign.

## Success for Zuni Salt Lake

On August 4, 2003, SRP announced that the company had canceled its plans for the coal mine and would also relinquish its permits and the coal leases it had acquired for the mine. This was a rare victory for indigenous peoples and environmental groups, since such energy projects usually proceed. For this reason, we believed that study of this environmental justice campaign is worthwhile.

After the announcement by SRP, Zuni Tribal Councilman Arden Kucate led a delegation to the edge of Zuni Salt Lake to pray and to make an offering of turquoise and bread to *Ma’ Oyattsik’i*, the Salt Mother. Back at Zuni Pueblo, the tribe’s Head Councilman Carlton Albert expressed his feelings of relief and appreciation to coalition partners who had worked with the Zuni Salt Lake campaign: “It has been a long . . . struggle . . . but we have had our voices heard. . . . If there is a lesson to be learned it is to never give up and [to] stay focused on what you want to accomplish” (Seciwa, 2003, p. 2).

### Act Locally!

#### Design an Environmental Advocacy Campaign for Your Campus or Community

What is one important step that your campus or community can take to support environmental values? Convert the university’s fleet of cars and trucks to biofuels? Reduce the use of paper? Divest portions of your school’s portfolio that is invested in fossil fuels?

Work with (or start) a campus or community group to design a campaign that pursues a specific, achievable objective (for example, persuade campus officials to phase out the use of coal in generating energy by a deadline: 2025? or convince a business or community center to start using solar energy within five years?).

In designing this campaign, how would you answer these questions?

1. What *exactly* do you want to accomplish?
2. Who has the ability to respond?
3. What will influence this person or authority to respond?

In designing your strategy, ask, “What groups are likely to be our base of support?” “Who will be our coalition partners?” “Who are our persuadables?” “What message and other communication materials will be required to perform the related communication tasks of mobilizing support to influence decision makers?”

As an exercise, you might answer these questions in the form of a proposal to submit to a campus or community group interested in pursuing such a campaign.

## Message Construction

The Zuni Salt Lake advocacy campaign succeeded in mobilizing area tribes, churches, elected officials, and others whose support was critical to their success. Yet, this is not always possible. In some cases, advocates may succeed in changing audiences’ beliefs

or attitudes but fail to mobilize them or change their behaviors. This disconnect between people's attitudes and their behaviors is called the *attitude-behavior gap* and is a major challenge facing advocacy campaigns.

In this final section, therefore, we describe this attitude-behavior gap and the question that environmental campaigns must address: How can advocates construct messages or persuasive appeals that will mobilize or influence their audiences to act in support of the campaign?

## The Attitude-Behavior Gap and the Importance of Values

### *The Attitude-Behavior Gap*

People generally have high regard for environmental amenities such as clean air and water, chemical-free food, parks, and open space. Yet, these attitudes do not always predict what people actually will do. Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), for example, found that we tend to engage in those environmental behaviors that demand the least cost, not only in money, but in "the time and effort needed to undertake a pro-environmental behavior"; that is, while many of us recycle (low-cost), we may "not necessarily engage in activities that are more costly and inconvenient such as driving or flying less" (p. 252).

Social scientists call this disconnect the *attitude-behavior gap*. The gap refers to the fact that, although individuals may have favorable attitudes or beliefs about environmental issues, they may not take any action; their *behavior*, therefore, is disconnected from their *attitudes*. Literary critic Stanley Fish (2008) provides a self-confessed example of this gap:

Now don't get me wrong. I am wholly persuaded by the arguments in support of the practices I resist. . . . But it is possible to believe something and still resist taking the actions your belief seems to require. . . . I know that in the great Book of Environmentalism my name will be on the page reserved for serial polluters. But I just can't get too worked up about it. (para. 9)

Like Stanley Fish, we may, for example, be convinced that using disposable paper cups is bad for the environment, but resist doing anything about it (e.g., bringing a reusable mug to the coffee shop or carrying a reusable water bottle). More troubling, scholars have found that, while many individuals believe global climate change is real and happening now, they may not feel any urgency to change their own behaviors or speak out (Moser, 2010). This gap is also seen in consumer behavior. Research by OgilvyEarth (2011) found a "green gap" in Americans' buying behavior: Although "82% of Americans have good green intentions . . . only 16% are dedicated to fulfilling these intentions" (para. 3).

The difficulty in changing people's behavior has been a concern, especially, in public information campaigns encouraging consumers to save energy or install energy-efficient appliances in their homes. In recent years, utility companies have expended enormous time and energy trying to improve energy efficiency in homes

and businesses, often with limited success. Merrian Fuller, a researcher at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, explained, "Convincing millions of Americans to divert their time and resources into upgrading their homes to eliminate energy waste, avoid high utility bills and help stimulate the economy is one of the great challenges facing energy efficiency programs around the country" (quoted in Mandel, 2010, para. 8).

One of the reasons that behavior-change campaigns often fail is that they assume that providing information—educating people—is enough. Simply knowing that better insulation in our attics will save us money on our energy bills, for example, is usually not enough to persuade us to purchase (and install) higher R-rated (energy-efficient) insulation. The reason, Fuller explained, is that, when information campaigns "address the issue of energy efficiency benefits, they . . . neglect the issue of *how to motivate consumers* [emphasis added]" to actually take action (quoted in Mandel, 2010, para. 9). The results of the Lawrence Berkeley study point to the importance of emotional, or affective, as well as educational elements, in designing messages for a campaign that expects people to take an action as a result of the campaign's communication. (We return to an example of such a campaign below.)

Campaigns do succeed (sometimes) in persuading people to change their behaviors. Although many factors are involved, an important component in successful campaigns is the construction of messages that are framed in terms of values that are important to those the campaign is aiming to reach.

### *Values and Pro-Environment Behavior*

While our beliefs often don't directly influence our behaviors, our values and cultural norms do play a role. Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence that pro-environmental behaviors are related to certain values (Crompton, 2008; Schultz & Zelezny 2003). In an earlier, classic study of the environmental movement, Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, and Kalof (1999) found that "individuals who accept a movement's basic values, believe that valued objects are threatened, and believe that their actions can help restore those values" are more likely to feel an obligation to act or provide support for the movement (p. 81).

Let's look at the different values that environmental advocacy campaigns sometimes consider in their messages.

Recent research suggests that there are three broad categories of values associated with environmental behaviors (Farrior, 2005, p. 11):

1. Egoistic concerns focusing on the self (health, quality of life, prosperity, convenience)
2. Social-altruistic concerns focusing on other people (children, family, community, humanity)
3. Biospheric concerns focusing on the well-being of living things (plants, animals)

Some people may be concerned about water pollution because of the dangers to themselves (for example, “I don’t want to drink polluted water”). Others may be motivated by social-altruistic concerns about their children or communities (“I don’t want my children to drink polluted water”). Finally, others may be concerned about the effects of polluted water on marine animals, living coral reefs, that is, they are motivated by wider, biospheric concerns.

What category of values is predominant? The answer may differ among different groups, regions, or cultures. For example, an international survey among college students found that social-altruistic values rated the highest. The survey, however, found that students in different countries differed about the importance of other values. In the United States, a majority rated egoistic concerns higher than biospheric, while students in Latin American countries placed biospheric concerns higher than egoistic (Schultz & Zelezny, 2003, pp. 129–130).

This finding presents an interesting dilemma for some advocates in choosing the values they’ll use in their campaign’s messages. For example, in arguing for the value of wilderness, the radical group Earth First! (2014) rejects all self-interested rationales for wilderness, such as recreation or medicines from native plants. Instead, the group voices a clear, biospheric value in its messaging. In stating there should be “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth,” the group explains,

Guided by a philosophy of deep ecology, Earth First! does not accept a human-centered worldview of “nature for people’s sake.” Instead, we believe that life exists for its own sake, that industrial civilization and its philosophy are anti-Earth, anti-woman and anti-liberty. . . . To put it simply, the Earth must come first. (paras. 5–6)

Earth First!, therefore, potentially faces a dilemma: Can appeals to biospheric values still gain a hearing from those motivated principally by social-altruistic or self-enhancement values? Or must wilderness advocates appeal to individuals’ egoistic concerns or their social-altruistic values to mobilize support from a wider public?

Responses to the dilemma about values have varied. The Biodiversity Project (now Bluestem Communications) in the U.S. Midwest, for example, has recommended that campaigns to protect natural resources be based on “messages that address socio-altruistic concerns or make biodiversity relevant to everyday life” (Farrior, 2005, p. 11). The key is using a “diversity of messages that will appeal to people with a different range of value orientation” (p. 11, quoting Schultz & Zelezny, 2003, p. 134). Similarly, a survey in the UK of values motivating people to adopt lower-carbon lifestyles found that, although biospheric values were important, more participants in the survey rated altruistic values significantly higher; for example, they expressed concern “about the plight of poorer people who will suffer from climate change” (Howell, 2013, p. 281).

As the Biodiversity Project and UK survey make clear, a campaign must choose values that potentially motivate or influence an audience, and it does this in the construction of its message.

## Message Construction: Values and Framing

As we noted earlier in this chapter, a campaign’s strategy has an important communication task—the identification of the appropriate educational and persuasive messages, spokespersons, and media for communicating with the campaign’s supporters and primary audience. We described a *message* as a phrase or sentence that succinctly expresses the campaign’s objective and, sometimes, the values that are at stake. It is usually compelling, memorable, and is used in all of a campaign’s communication materials.

A campaign’s message, therefore, can play a pivotal role in addressing the attitude-behavior gap that occurs for many audiences. This is particularly true when a campaign refers, in its message, to an important value that its audience perceives as threatened, such as their health or a natural area that has special meaning. Let’s look more closely, therefore, at the role of values in a campaign’s messaging and the ways in which campaigns frame these messages.

### *Framing and a Campaign’s Values*

The role of values in environment campaigns can be illustrated in the messages used by many U.S. environmental groups in their fight against pollution from coal-burning power plants. The *New York Times* reported that many of these groups have been “stepping up their transition toward a new health-centric message” (Schor, 2011, para. 1). The Sierra Club’s online campaign, for example, led with this statement:

Not only is coal burning responsible for one third of US carbon emissions—the main contributor to climate disruption—but it is also *making us sick*, leading to as many as *13,000 premature deaths* every year and *more than \$100 billion in annual health costs* [emphasis added]. (Sierra Club, 2014, para. 1)

Similarly, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and other groups commissioned a dramatic photo-ad showing a young girl wearing a respirator and the message “It’s our air, but big polluters treat it like they own it. They dump millions of tons of dangerous pollution into our air, threatening the health of all Americans” (NRDC, 2014, para 1).

Words and phrases such as “*making us sick*,” “*premature deaths*,” “*health costs*,” and “*dangerous pollutants*” and a photo of a child with a respirator are intended to evoke a powerful frame in the minds of a campaign’s target audience. In Chapter 3, we described a *frame* as a cognitive map or pattern of interpretation that we use to organize our understanding of reality. It is important to understand that frames are not just words but are deeper, often unconscious, mental structures. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff (2010) claims that “All of our knowledge makes use of frames, and every word is defined through the frames it neutrally activates” (p. 71). Moreover, he argues, many of our “frame-circuits have direct connections to the emotional regions of the brain” (p. 72).

A campaign's message, therefore, must evoke an existing and emotionally relevant frame to be successful. Environmentalists' campaigns against coal-burning power plants, as we saw, used words that were designed to evoke an existing, powerful frame for many Americans—a concern for their health and, especially, the health of their children.

### Framing an Energy Savings Message

Let's illustrate the use of emotionally relevant frames in one of the campaigns to convince “millions of Americans” to save energy, which we mentioned earlier.

After surveying the best practices of 14 home energy-efficiency programs in the United States, researchers at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory concluded that, in urging consumers to save energy, it is not enough to provide information. An information campaign's communication must address something people value—“health benefits, improved comfort, community pride, or other benefits that consumers tend to care about” (Fuller et al., 2010, p. 2). Researchers, therefore, recommended that the energy campaigns spend time



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Some advocacy campaigns take years or decades to achieve their goal. The Dongria Kondh tribe in India declared victory in 2014 after almost a decade-long campaign to thwart Vedanta Resources from pushing them off their land in order to mine bauxite. International groups such as Survival and Amnesty International worked in a coalition with local organizations and people to amplify Dongria's campaign.

studying their audience—residential customers—and “tailor messages to this audience” (Fuller et al., p. 2). In constructing their messages, they advised the programs to “avoid meaningless or negatively associated words like ‘retrofit’ and ‘audit.’ [Instead,] use words and ways of communicating that *tap into customer's existing mental frames* [emphasis added]” (Fuller et al., p. 2).

One of the successful programs studied by the Berkeley Lab was an experiment in rural, conservative Kansas, urging people to save energy. “Don't mention global warming,” Nancy Jackson warned. “And don't mention Al Gore. People out here just hate him” (quoted in Kaufman, 2010, p. A1). Jackson heads the Climate Action and Energy Project, a nonprofit group in Kansas whose goal is to persuade people to reduce fossil fuel emissions that contribute to climate change. But any talk about climate change or global warming is very unpopular in rural Kansas. So, how could the project go about constructing a message to persuade people to cut their use of oil or coal-generated electricity?

Jackson felt that saving energy was a different matter. The project's message could separate this from appeals about stopping global warming. She explained, “If the goal was to persuade people to reduce their use of fossil fuels, why not identify issues that motivated them instead of getting stuck on something that did not?” (Kaufman, 2010, p. A4). The project, therefore, commissioned a study of independent voters and Republicans in the area around Wichita and Kansas City to identify what people cared about, what worried them, or what values motivated them.

Based on its study, the project ran an experiment “to see if by focusing [its messages] on thrift, patriotism, spiritual conviction, and economic prosperity, it could rally residents of six Kansas towns to take meaningful steps to conserve energy and consider renewable fuels” (Kaufman, 2010, p. A4). It adapted its message in a number of ways as it worked with civic leaders, churches, and schools. For example, Jackson talked with civic leaders about jobs in renewable energy, such as wind power, as a way of boosting local economies.

Jackson also spoke to Kansas ministers about “Creation Care,” the duty of Christians “to act as stewards of the world that God gave them” (Kaufman, 2010, p. A4). And, importantly, Jackson used the appeal of thrift to persuade the six towns to compete to see which could save the most energy and money. As part of the competition, for example, schoolchildren “searched for ‘vampire’ electric loads, or appliances that sap energy even when they seem to be off,” and towns' restaurants served meals by candlelight for Valentine's Day. The project discovered, while many of the towns' residents believed global warming was a “hoax,” they cared about “saving money”; as one man explained, “That's what really motivated them” (quoted in Kaufman, p. A4).

By the end of the first year of the experiment, the project saw signs of success. Overall, the six towns experienced energy savings of more than 6 million kilowatt-hours (Fuller et al., 2010, p. 13). This amounted to a decline in energy use in the towns “by as much as 5 percent relative to other areas—a giant step in the world of energy conservation” (Kaufman, 2010, p. A4).

Finally, a reminder: While constructing the campaign's message is important, a message, even if powerful, cannot alone succeed in achieving a group's ultimate objectives. Messages must always be aligned with other aspects of the campaign—its objective, key audiences, and so on. In other words, messages help to implement a campaign's overall strategy—its mode of leverage or influence—that is designed to persuade the primary decision makers who are able to act on the campaign's objective.

#### Another Viewpoint: Framing or Organizing?

Sociologists Robert Brulle and Craig Jenkins disagree with George Lakoff and others' views of framing and its importance for environmental advocacy. They argue that simply reframing an issue linguistically without addressing the basic causes of political and economic change won't alter entrenched power. Satirizing Lakoff's views, they write,

Social reality is defined simply in terms of how we *perceive* reality. If we just get the right frames out there, it will create political consensus, and the progressive alliance can then take power. However comforting this idea might sound, it is a form of linguistic mysticism that assumes that social institutions can be transformed by cultural redefinition alone. . . . The structure of power has to be changed as part of the process, and any rhetorical strategy that promises to be effective must link its rhetoric to a broader political strategy that includes grassroots organizing at its base. . . . Although better framing would be useful, alone it can do little. We need to move beyond simplistic analyses and clever spin tactics. What is needed is a new organizational strategy that engages citizens and fosters the development of enlightened self-interest and an awareness of long-term community interests. (pp. 84, 86).

SOURCE: Robert J. Brulle & J. Craig Jenkins. (2006, March). Spinning Our Way to Sustainability? *Organization & Environment*, 19(1), 82–87.

#### SUMMARY

In this chapter, we focused on the environmental advocacy campaign, its key characteristics, and the importance of constructing campaign messages that resonate with the values of a campaign's audience.

- In the first section, we defined the *advocacy campaign* as a strategic course of action, involving communication, that is undertaken for a specific purpose, and we distinguished campaigns from *critical rhetorics*, the general questioning or criticism of the status quo.
- In the second section, we outlined the basic elements of advocacy campaigns:
  - Goals and objectives
  - Identifying key decision makers and audiences
  - Developing a strategy

- And the communication tasks of an advocacy campaign; among these are
  - mobilizing constituencies, and
  - including a campaign “message” in all communications.
- In the third section, we described a successful environmental justice advocacy campaign—the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition's campaign against plans to strip-mine for coal near sacred Native American lands.
- Finally, we discussed the role of message construction in campaigns, including the importance of key values of an audience; we also identified two challenges:
  - Overcoming the attitude–behavior gap
  - Identifying values in the construction of messages that motivate key audiences

It is our hope that, when you have finished reading this chapter, you will appreciate some of the elements important in designing an advocacy campaign, as well as the role of critical rhetorics in questioning existing practices and ideologies. As a result, we hope you will feel inspired to work with others on your campus or in your community to do extraordinary things.

#### SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- Roger Kaye, *Last Great Wilderness: The Campaign to Establish the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2006.
- *A Fierce Green Fire: The Battle for a Living Planet* (Synopsis, trailer, and DVD at: <http://afiercegreenfire.com>)
- 350.org: “We’re building a global movement to solve the climate crisis.” See this site for current campaigns, projects, and resources for grassroots actions in as many as 188 countries.
- Simon Cottle and Libby Lester (Eds.), *Transnational Protests and the Media*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011.
- For images, film, and history of the Zuni Salt Lake and the campaign to protect it, see [www.sacredland.org/zuni-salt-lake](http://www.sacredland.org/zuni-salt-lake).
- Ronald E. Rice and Charles K. Atkin (Eds.), *Public Communication Campaigns* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012.

#### KEY TERMS

Advocacy	177	Communication tasks (of a campaign)	183
Advocacy campaign	180	Critical rhetoric	179
Attitude–behavior gap	198	Goal (of a campaign)	184
Base	189		

Irreparable	190	Praxis	186
Leverage	186	Primary audience	185
Message	190	Secondary audience	185
Objective (of a campaign)	184	Strategy	186
Opinion leaders	189	Strip-mining	192
Opponents	189	Tactics	186
Persuadables	189		

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A common perception of strategy is that, with the worsening of environmental problems, people will wake up and begin to take action. Is this an accurate view? What would it take to wake people up to be really effective?
2. Do you, as a consumer, have power to affect environmental change? Journalist William Greider (2003) says that consumers are in a weak position and have very little actual leverage over the actions of large corporations. Do you agree?
3. Can advocates for wilderness or endangered species appeal to biospheric values and still gain acceptance from the audiences they must persuade? Or must they appeal to the egoistic concerns of individuals or to their social-altruistic values to gain a hearing or mobilize support?
4. How effective is the framing of a campaign's message? Do you agree with Brulle and Jenkins ("Another Viewpoint") that simply reframing an issue without addressing political and economic change won't alter entrenched power?

### NOTES

1. For more information on the success of this campaign, see <http://ecocycle.org/bestrawfree>.
2. For more information about the campaign, see <http://content.sierraclub.org/coal/campuses>.
3. Environmental, public health, and consumer groups have continued their pressure on meat producers' uses of antibiotics. In 2014, one of the largest U.S. poultry producers announced it would "no longer use antibiotics in its hatcheries, one of the last places it was using such drugs routinely" (Strom, 2014, p. B3).
4. In describing the Zuni Salt Lake Coalition's campaign, we are indebted to meeting notes of the coalition and its campaign materials and to Andy Bessler, a coalition member and environmental justice organizer, who worked for the Sierra Club and generously shared his recollections of the campaign in a personal interview with Cox, September 24, 2003.