



How to Improve Pedestrian Safety in San Francisco

Media Advocacy



Traffic Safety Programs

SFDPH Community Health Education Section

http://www.dph.sf.ca.us/traffic_safety/

Media Advocacy

News has a powerful influence on people's perceptions of the world. The media can provide visibility, legitimacy, and credibility to an issue. The news media can communicate to opinion leaders and influential people, as well as the general public. It frames issues by suggesting what issues people should think about, how they should think about them, and who has worthwhile things to say about the issues.

The purpose of media advocacy on issues such as traffic safety is to change policy or influence decision-makers to improve conditions.^{3,9} The general idea is to raise awareness, increase community support and mobilize community action through the use of the media with the goal of enacting or changing policies to improve pedestrian and traffic safety. Similar to community organizing, media advocacy shifts the focus from the health of the individual to the health of the community as a whole. It also shifts the focus from a "blaming the victim" perspective to one on shared responsibility and social accountability. Using the media as an advocacy tool also makes an issue more visible, sets a public agenda and shapes the actions of policy makers to take a specific action.

Community groups and advocates can utilize media advocacy to influence policymakers to improve traffic and pedestrian safety in their neighborhood. Just keep in mind the following steps:

Develop Your Strategy⁹

With limited resources, advocates need to focus their attention on a small number of key policymakers and opinion leaders. This means that you need to be strategic. Always assess your use of media in relation to, and in support of, other approaches. You should always use community organizing in conjunction with media advocacy in order to build support for the changes you want (see *Community Organizing*).

Media advocacy is ultimately about creating positive changes for your community. Therefore, you must identify what those changes are before you start to engage the media. There's no sense in talking to journalists if you and your community are not clear about which changes you want.

When developing your strategy, you should address five questions that help form your overall strategy and where media advocacy would be appropriate. These questions are:

1. What is the problem?
2. What is the solution?
3. Who has the power to make the necessary change(s)?
4. Who must be mobilized to apply pressure for change(s)?
5. What message would convince those with the power to make the necessary change(s)?

Again, if you are using media advocacy, focus on social accountability and improving the health of the community as a whole. Here's an example of how these questions can be answered from 2 different perspectives:

	Individual approach (Educational Campaigns)	Community approach (Media Advocacy)
What is the problem?	People driving at excessive speeds	Roads are designed to encourage speeding
What is the solution?	Educate drivers about hazards of speeding	Get traffic calming measures on streets to encourage drivers to slow down
Who has the power to make the necessary change(s)?	Drivers themselves	Elected officials, local transportation and public works departments
Who must be mobilized to apply pressure for change(s)?	Media and safety groups, to deliver and reinforce educational messages	Community groups and neighborhood residents
What message would convince those with the power to make the necessary change(s)?	Radio public service announcements during rush hour educating drivers about hazards of speeding	Press conference at local intersection highlighting road conditions that encourage speeding and how the roads should be changed

It must be noted that both approaches are useful and necessary. People won't be able to change their behavior if they don't have the proper knowledge AND if the environmental context doesn't support it. However, these approaches should be used alternately depending on the ultimate goal. And sometimes, both approaches are used simultaneously to achieve the desired change.

Develop Your News Stories ⁹

Now that you know who the focus of your advocacy effort is and what you want them to do, you can start developing the stories that will help convince them. This is the pre-planning that you will need to do in order to be prepared for a media event. Keep in mind a few points:

- ◆ *Identify your 3 key points.* These 3 points should be 1) what is the pedestrian safety problem; 2) why is this problem important; and 3) what should be done to address the problems. Some of the bullets below elaborate on what these points should incorporate.
- ◆ *Develop media "bites."* Keep it short and simple – 15 seconds maximum. Figure out how to say what you want in a way that will make it more likely to be quoted. (Of course, this means that you know what you want to say first before you decide how to say it.)
- ◆ *Translate the individual problem into a social issue.* This means emphasizing social problems and broader contributing causes **in addition to** individual choices.
- ◆ *Stress why is it important to improve traffic safety.* Journalists and their audiences will not pay attention to your story unless they are presented with a clear reason why it is important to a broad audience.
- ◆ *Provide data.* News stories are more likely to get coverage when you provide journalists with 1-3 statistics. Also, consider using "social math." This is a way to make large statistical numbers clear and compelling by placing them in a social context that provides meaning. See the example below.
- ◆ *Present a solution.* Without a clear solution to advance, getting media attention to your issue may be difficult or even counter-productive. Present both practical and moral reasons why your proposed solutions should be enacted.
- ◆ *Consider who would be the most effective spokespeople.* Credibility and legitimacy of the people giving the message is critical. The spokesperson may also change if you need to appeal to different audiences, particularly if you are reaching out to media outlets that target different language groups.



- ◆ *Recruit people to tell their personal story.* Reporters need to have a personal account to illustrate the story. It is a critical requirement for the news. Often, people who have been injured or are related to someone that died of a traffic-related injury have unique power to shape news coverage.
- ◆ *Develop compelling visuals.* TV news must have good visuals and newspapers often utilize photographs and graphics as well.

Plan a Media Event ^{3,9}

Before holding a media event (i.e., press conference or demonstration), be sure that you are using your resources wisely. Putting on a media event takes lots of time and energy so you want to be certain that the media event is worthwhile. Ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ Why do you want to have this media event?
- ◆ Is a news event the best way to reach those goals?
- ◆ What is the objective of the media event?
- ◆ Why should the media be interested in covering your event?

If the answers to these questions indicate the need for a media event, then plan carefully to ensure good media coverage.

Consider the following:

Before the event

- ◆ *Decide on the best time and location.* On weekday mornings, the best time to plan an event that is most convenient to journalists' schedules is 10 a.m. Hold your event at central, easy to find locations. Let journalists know in advance



about parking availability. Select a photogenic location with adequate room for media and participants.

- ◆ *Time your event well.* Try to avoid conflicting with other prominent events (such as a local election or a jury giving a verdict to a well-known trial). You don't want to compete with other stories that journalists may give more priority to. You may also link the timing of an event to an anniversary or holiday that increases the newsworthiness of your story. For example, there is usually a spike in pedestrian injuries when daylight savings time ends in the fall. This may be a good time to highlight environmental changes for pedestrian safety so that walkers are more visible to drivers.
- ◆ *Write press release and media advisory.* See *Writing a Media Advisory* and *Writing a Press Release* on pages 30-31.
- ◆ *Start media outreach early.* Fax a media advisory or news release 3-7 days before your event. Don't start too early because your efforts will not register with journalists. They usually plan no more than a few days in advance.
- ◆ *Follow up.* One to two days before the event, follow up your faxed news release with phone calls to journalists you are most interested in coming to the event. Make sure your release was received and offer to answer any questions prior to the event.
- ◆ *Prepare media kits and an agenda for the event.* The point of the media kit is to have all the key information in one



place in order to make the journalists' jobs as easy as possible. These kits typically include your press release, fact sheet, and other background information. Make sure you identify a contact person for journalists and have their phone number and email address on the media kits.

- ◆ *Choose and train speakers for the event.* These speakers are ideally your spokespeople and people personally affected by the specific issue. Speakers should be informed and knowledgeable about the issue. They should be able to state your prepared media bites, tell their personal stories, and advocate for the policies you want.

At the event

- ◆ *Check on location logistics.* Provide microphones for speakers if necessary. If you are going to show video or audio-tapes, make sure the equipment is working. Confirm there are enough electrical outlets and extension cords for cameras and lights.
- ◆ *Set up a check-in table near the entrance of the location where you can greet journalists.* Have a sign-in sheet so you can keep track of all media representatives. Distribute media kits and agendas.
- ◆ *Simplify the issue you are advocating for.* Advocacy issues are often complicated, which goes against a journalist's training to tell simple stories. Simplify your issue as much as possible to make their job easier. Tell your story to the journalists the way they would present it to the general public. In-

corporate your media bites, data and proposed solutions. Above all, be sure to state your 3 key points. Also, see *Tips for Talking to Reporters at a Media Event* below.

- ◆ *Help reporters identify the right people to interview.* Be sure to introduce reporters to spokespeople or have speakers available for interviews afterwards.
- ◆ *Provide interesting visuals.* Television news in particular must incorporate visuals into their story. If you want TV news coverage, visuals are mandatory.

After the event

- ◆ *Follow up with journalists.* You should contact all those who attended your event to see if they need any further information. Send media kits to journalists that did not come and call them to see if they want an interview.

Tips for Talking to Reporters at a Media Event³

- You don't have to respond to every question, especially if you feel like the question doesn't address the social problems and broader contributing causes. Instead you can say, "The real issue is..."
- Repeat your 3 key points. You can always change the subject to talk about your issue.
- Never answer questions that you don't understand. Rather, ask the reporter to restate it.
- If you don't know the answer, say so. Don't ever bluff. Offer to find out information after the press conference. Contact the reporter once you do have the information.
- Pause. Think before you speak.
- Explain but don't argue.
- Give information instead of denials.
- If a reporter is confrontational or attacks you, stay calm and reasonable. Don't take the attack personally.
- Don't reveal more than you want to. The reporter will ask follow-up questions based on what you say.



Writing a Media Advisory⁹

A media advisory is basically an invitation to your event. It contains the main information journalists need to know. You can fax or email the media advisory anytime from 3 to 5 days before your event. Be sure to follow up with a more detailed press release.

The following is the standard format for a media advisory. It includes all the necessary elements and a brief description of the information you should provide. Put this advisory on organizational letterhead before sending it out.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Today's date)

CONTACT: (Name)
(Phone No. & Email Address)

HEADLINE: Keep it short and in all capital letters and bold font

WHAT: (two to three sentences on what is happening)

WHEN: (date and time)

WHERE: (address)

WHO: (names of people or organizations involved)

WHY: (two to three sentences that emphasize why this event is newsworthy and important)

#

(center alignment; do not omit –
this signals the end of the advisory)

Writing a Press Release⁹

A press release is much more detailed than an advisory. It is written like a news story, including a headline, lead paragraph, background facts, quotes, and details on the issue for which you are advocating.

The following is the standard format for a press release. Each paragraph should be no longer than 4-5 lines. Keep the release to two pages at the most. Put this advisory on organizational letterhead before sending it out. Follow up with phone calls and include your press release in your media kits.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
(Today's date)

CONTACT: (Name)
(Phone No. & Email Address)

HEADLINE: Keep it short, make it attention-getting,
and write in all capital letters and bold font

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – (list location of story in bold before start of first paragraph)

1st paragraph: What is happening, who is involved, where and when. This is the most important paragraph of the press release. Write it well but keep it brief. If done correctly, this will grab the journalists' attention.

2nd paragraph: Why this event is important and newsworthy

3rd paragraph: Quote from an expert involved that emphasizes how significant this event is

4th paragraph: More details on where and when the event is happening

5th and all paragraphs afterwards: Other relevant details, including:

- Further quotes from other spokespeople
- Description of visual opportunities

Final Paragraph One sentence "boilerplate" description of the organization(s) involved in the event

If release goes onto a second page, type the word "**MORE**" at the bottom of the first page in bold font and center alignment

OR

(to signal the end of the release)

Write to the Editorial Pages

Instead of doing a media event, you can write an op-ed piece or letter to the editor. The editorial pages of a newspaper are the most frequently read after the front page. In fact, this is probably your best chance to present your argument to reach the decision-makers you are targeting.⁹ Policymakers turn to these pages often to quickly assess what the hot issues are.

Writing an Op-Ed Piece ⁹

An op-ed piece gives you an opportunity to expand on your ideas, tell a personal story, or give the background on your issue. Because these pages are so popular, it can be hard to get published.

Don't write too much – approximately 650-700 words at the maximum. Develop one idea, support it with concrete examples, tell personal stories when possible, and propose a solution. The editors of these pages particularly look for submissions from “everyday” people who can personalize an issue.

Writing Letters to the Editor ⁹

A letter to the editor provides a forum for community members to express their point of view on current events. Ask your friends and colleagues to also write letters because the number of letters submitted will indicate the importance of the topic.

If you see a newspaper article that you want to respond to, send your letter to the editor within 24 hours. Mention your reason for writing in the first sentence. If you are responding to an article, include the headline and publication date. If you are commenting on a local current event, be specific about the event.

Keep your letter to 3 paragraphs and a total of approximately 250 words. Be as direct and to the point as you can. Focus on one message you want to get across to readers. Take a strong position on that message. If you can, use a compelling fact that shows the urgency or importance of your issue.

Be sure to start your letter with the date and “Dear Editor.” Include your name, address, phone number, and email address. Editors may call to verify your submission. You can put your letter on letterhead if your organization permits you.

At the very beginning of your letter, include an inside address. Similar to a business letter, an inside address looks like:

Letters to the Editor
[Newspaper name]
[Newspaper address, fax, or email]

And lastly, get the name and contact information of the correct editor to whom you should send the letter, which is usually included in the masthead of the editorial pages. You want to make sure your letter reaches the right person.

Evaluate Your Hard Work ⁹

Regardless of what kind of media advocacy methods you employ – be it a press conference, demonstration, op-ed piece, or letter to the editor – you should evaluate your efforts. This doesn't have to be complicated – a simple reflection on your work will do. How did you do? Did you achieve what you intended? Was your issue covered by the media that your target decision-makers watch or read? Was your story told in the way that you wanted? Did your media work help you build community support for your overall goal?

Some ways to evaluate your media efforts include:

- ◆ Document how the media covered your efforts. Keep copies of articles or videos.
- ◆ Do some follow up with reporters and ask why they did or did not cover your issue.
- ◆ Track the media stories on pedestrian and traffic safety and see whether they cover the story differently after your efforts.
- ◆ Ask policymakers if and how your media efforts affected their decision making.
- ◆ Ask colleagues and reporters for suggestions to improve your effectiveness.

Case Study

Senior Action Network



Often, the main mode of transportation for seniors is walking. Unfortunately, seniors hit by automobiles in San Francisco are four times as likely to be killed as younger people. To improve environmental conditions for older residents who walk, Senior Action Network (SAN) became heavily involved in pedestrian safety initiatives beginning in the 1990s. Today, they are one of the foremost community-based organizations working on pedestrian safety.

In the early 1990s, many of SAN's members were very concerned about the dangers they faced when walking in San Francisco. In response, SAN mobilized its membership to work on this issue. They created their *Pedestrian Safety Platform*, which serves as a list of needed improvements as well as an overall strategy to guide their efforts. This platform demands that San Francisco city officials carry out specific educational, engineering, enforcement, and policy measures to improve pedestrian safety.

Some of these demands include banning the use of hand-held cell phones while driving, banning right turns on red, and timing cross-walk signals to provide a minimum of 1 second of crossing time for every 2.5 feet of width on the street. SAN also created a list of the *Terrible Two Dozen*, a list of intersections seniors considered the most dangerous throughout the city.

SAN members decided the best way to achieve the improvements they wanted was to generate stories in the media on pedestrian safety, thereby getting policymakers' attention. Once their overall *Pedestrian Safety Platform* was developed, SAN put together elements for its news stories. First and foremost, SAN identified its 3 key points. These were: 1) seniors were at higher risk for pedestrian injury, 2) it was important to ensure that seniors were able to walk safely in order to get around, 3) and specific engineering, education, and enforcement measures identified in the *SAN Pedestrian Safety Platform* should be instituted.

They emphasized the broader contributing factors related to senior pedestrian injury – seniors take a longer time to cross the street than younger people, seniors may not be able to recover from injuries due to fragile bones and other age-related issues, and yet seniors need to walk as a main mode of transportation as they get older. In short, walking was a social justice issue for seniors and conditions needed to be improved. SAN considered the main social problem to be the lack of pedestrian facilities available in San Francisco neighborhoods. Improving the walking environment would increase the safety of seniors and all other residents walking in the neighborhood.

To garner the media's attention, SAN held demonstrations at a number of intersections listed in their *Terrible Two Dozen* to highlight the need for pedestrian safety. Prior to demonstrations, SAN frequently conducted *Senior University* classes, which trained attendees on community organizing, public speaking, and media relations techniques. These trainings provided a number of spokespeople who were able to give interviews in English, Spanish, Chinese, and other languages as necessary.

For each demonstration, SAN wrote a press release highlighting the reasons why it considered the specific intersection dangerous. Most demonstrations were held at 10 a.m. to accommodate journalists' schedules. SAN developed clever themes and media soundbites prior to the demonstration that highlighted its concerns. For example, at the intersection of Van Ness Avenue and Market Street, SAN members chanted "Don't Mow Us Down" while crossing the street with lawnmowers. They also recruited the SF City Attorney to push a lawnmower across Market Street. This provided excellent soundbites and visuals for the media that attended.

Often, SAN scheduled a demonstration to coincide with a holiday. For example, one Halloween, SAN members dressed in costumes at the intersection of Third and Palou Streets with signs such as

“I Will HOWL if You Hit Me” and “Don’t Hit Your Grand-Mummy.” During the holidays, SAN held a demonstration at the intersection of Bayshore and Arleta. Seniors in Santa hats sang Christmas carols with altered lyrics on pedestrian safety and held signs such as “Jingle Bells – Run Like Hell.” These were creative, brilliant ways to attract media to get SAN’s message across to policymakers.



These strategies worked. SAN garnered a lot of press coverage for each demonstration it held, which caught the attention of policymakers. The Board of Supervisors responded quite positively to SAN’s *Pedestrian Safety Platform*. DPH, SFPD, and DPT (now the MTA) responded by implementing education, enforcement and traffic engineering measures. Due to SAN’s successful media advocacy efforts, its members are now able to talk to policymakers directly on desired pedestrian safety improvements.



**City & County of San Francisco
Department of Public Health
Community Health Programs**

Find out more about our injury data, community-based projects, media campaigns, and general information at:
http://www.dph.sf.ca.us/traffic_safety/

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