Integrated Relations: Coordinating Legislative and Media Strategies for Effective Advocacy

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Legislative Advocacy Today

- “Insider” strategies no longer enough
- Reasons:
  - Term limits
  - Greater competition for State funds
  - Ballot initiatives
Higher Education’s Challenges

- How can we shape the public policy agenda?
- How can we expand our State House influence?
- How can we cultivate and sustain a positive, supportive political climate for our universities and colleges?
Integrating Media Strategies into Legislative Advocacy

1. “Integrated Media” defined
2. Integrated Media and Messaging
3. Intended Outcomes
I. Integrated Relations

- **Definition:**
  - to strategically incorporate all relevant institutional tools and resources to advance public policy and funding objectives

- **The usual suspects:**
  - State Relations personnel
  - Institutional leaders
  - Communications and Advancement personnel
  - Trustees, alumni, donors, and friends
  - Corporate, industry, and stakeholder supporters
  - Opinion leaders
Integrating Media as an Advocacy Strategy

- “The media can’t tell you what to think, but they can tell you what to think about!”
- Incorporates media and PR as fundamental and strategic elements of legislative advocacy
- Requires as much planning and foresight as the other political aspects of the legislative game plan
Relationship with Lobbying

- Lobbying is primary element of advocacy
- Media and PR are essential secondary elements
- Media and PR are complementary strategies, not substitutes
Integrating Media as an Advocacy Strategy

- The objective:
  - to create public awareness of, and interest in, the institution’s policy and funding priorities before and while they’re considered in the legislative arena

- The goal:
  - to position the institution’s legislative agenda as an important and relevant State priority
Benefits of Integrated Media

- Gives added credibility to your legislative agenda
- Helps generate public (and thus political) interest in your institution
- Takes advantage of news media as a conduit between messenger and primary audiences
- Short-term and long-term impact
II. Making It Work

“How do we utilize the mass media to generate public awareness and interest in our upcoming legislative agenda?”
Comparing Approaches

- Conventional approach:
  - State Relations leader involves media relations and PR staff tactically when help is needed
  - Generally used to address specific issue or immediate need

- Integrated approach:
  - Media relations and PR personnel are a fully integrated part of State Relations team
  - Media and PR strategies are always key elements of State Relations planning
  - Long-term commitment
Take a Campaign Approach

- Research and determine the message
- Identify stakeholders
- Establish the necessary coalitions and influencers to advance the message within and outside the State House
- Structure a comprehensive game plan to achieve success
The Seasons of Advocacy

1. Legislative agenda is determined well in advance of legislative session
2. Integrated advocacy campaign launched
3. Legislative session arrives

1. Plan and schedule media activities to support the agenda; rollout begins is sustained for duration
2. Media strategies and tactics used to support all aspects; raises public awareness and credibility
3. Previous media coverage and activities used to support institution’s appeals
Example: Hay University
FY08-09 Legislative Agenda

- Seeking 5% increase each year
- Money would support:
  - general operations
  - expanded nursing education program
  - employee compensation
  - new science lab
Nursing Education: Media Possibilities

- Hold a conference on the future of nursing education in the state (eight months out)
- Encourage hospital CEOs, doctors, nurses, nursing home administrators, and other stakeholders to each submit op-eds about the need (spread out over six months)
- Create a formal “coalition” of stakeholders and hold news conference(s)
More Media Possibilities

- Host a meeting of legislators and stakeholders to talk about the issue, and invite the media (three months out)
- Schedule high-visibility speaking opportunities for university faculty and president; leaders of key stakeholder groups
- Pitch topic and speakers to in-state talk radio
Don’t Forget The Students!

- Involve students
  - Career fair coverage
  - Guest editorials and letters to the editor
  - Letters to their local legislators about the need
  - Meetings with legislators, Rotary Clubs, etc.
  - Visits to editorial writers
  - Others?

- All of these are possibilities for media coverage
- All of these help position your institution for successful advocacy
III. Results of Efforts:

- Establishment, in the minds of the public and policy makers, of:
  - the need to graduate more nurses
  - the reasons why policy makers should intervene (and care!)
  - the role that your institution can play to help remedy the situation
  - the relevance and importance of your institution’s legislative agenda
Hay U.’s Other Legislative Priorities

- Should be treated the same way:
  - Define message
  - Identify the stakeholders
  - Develop a timetable and rollout plan for media
  - Integrate with rest of agenda and advocacy plan
Conditions for Success

- An 18-month calendar
- Full buy-in from top institutional leaders
- Close coordination with State Relations Director
- Full cooperation from your media relations and PR directors and staff
- Full cooperation from all Advancement-related offices
Remember…

- “The media can’t tell you what to think, but they *can* tell you what to think about!”
  - (Cohen, 1963)