

4 Is Media Advocacy for You?

4.1 General considerations and challenges

Ensuring the physical and emotional safety of the women involved in advocacy is critical to delivering a successful Media Advocacy Program. Organisational systems also need to be in place to support worker wellbeing, as working with advocates can provoke strong emotional and physical responses (see the 'Worker safety' box in [Section 5.3](#)).

Other considerations include the diverse set of worker and organisational skills and the resources needed to run an effective program.

A challenge is promoting messages of gender equality in the media – a traditionally male dominated field.¹ This is covered in [Section 7.3.3: Gendered nature of media](#). For more information on how to work effectively with the media, see [Section 7.2: Engaging and working with the media](#).

4.2 Fit with your organisational purpose and values

Is a Media Advocacy Program a good fit with your organisation's purpose, culture and values? Your organisation needs to have:

- a commitment to the prevention of violence against women
- a depth of knowledge about violence against women and its prevention
- the ability to support women who have experienced violence
- a feminist framework underpinning its work
- an interest in influencing the public debate and public policy on violence against women and its prevention.

4.3 Capacity to support advocates

The safety and wellbeing of advocates is of upmost importance and your organisation's capacity to ensure this is vital.

The ability to respond to the support needs of advocates individually and an advocate program more generally will vary between organisations. For example, family violence or sexual assault support services are well placed to understand safety issues and to provide counselling and support to women. However, due to the crisis focus of their work, they may struggle to prioritise ongoing support to an advocacy program and could benefit from partnering with an organisation to share the time pressures.

Similarly, organisations that do not provide direct counselling or case management services, but have capacity to provide non-clinical support to the program, will need to think about how they can partner with organisations that do.

[Section 6: Working with advocates](#) provides greater detail on meeting the needs of advocates and is vital reading for any organisation implementing a Media Advocacy Program.

This section provides an overview of the organisational requirements to successfully run a Media Advocacy Program and will help you decide whether it is for you.

4.4 Capacity to support program staff

Program staff will face a range of issues in their role supporting vulnerable women. Your organisation will need to provide or organise access to appropriate debriefing, supervision and support to workers involved in working with advocates.

For example, workers may be exposed to vicarious trauma through hearing the experiences of advocates and have difficult decisions and interactions to manage. These may vary from decisions over which advocate to match to a media opportunity or how best to provide feedback to an advocate after an advocacy engagement.

Organisations that do not have these structures in place need to consider how they can provide support to their workers. For example, do you have adequately skilled staff to provide this level of support, can partner organisations be engaged to provide support or do you need to contract external supervision and support? For more information on worker safety, see the 'Worker safety' box in [Section 5.3](#).

4.5 Skills and knowledge

A varied skill and knowledge set is required to effectively deliver a Media Advocacy Program (see 'Skills and knowledge required' box below). If you don't have these skills in-house, you need to consider recruitment, training or partnerships with other organisations that do (see [Section 5: Program planning](#)).

Skills and knowledge required include (but are not limited to):

- Depth of knowledge of violence against women and its impacts on women, children, families and communities
- Understanding of the primary prevention of violence against women and health promotion
- Understanding of the gendered nature of violence and the feminist underpinnings of responses to violence and its prevention
- Skills in provision of support and counselling
- Understanding the media cycle, forms of media, and ways of working with the media
- Understanding what represents sensitive and quality media representation of violence against women
- Skills in communications and public speaking to be able to support advocates
- Community development skills
- Advocacy skills and knowledge
- Experience in evaluation
- Skills in relationship building
- Project management skills
- Flexibility
- High-level communication skills.

4.6 Resources – staffing and program costs

4.6.1 Staffing

In establishing a Media Advocacy Program, you are committing your organisation to being responsive to media requests which are often at short notice, may be after hours and require a prompt response. This requires a high level of flexibility, particularly for staff involved in the program.

The role of coordinating a Media Advocacy Program can be difficult to fill. It requires a person (or people) with diverse skills including media and communications, the ability to support advocates, knowledge of violence against women and its prevention and community development skills. An understanding of the pace of the media cycle is key. The program worker or workers will be responsible for the day-to-day development and coordination of the program, working with and supporting advocates, and liaising with the media and other stakeholders wishing to engage advocates.

The role of the project worker ideally requires flexible working hours to accommodate media requests such as out of office hour interviews and events, and the worker needs to be a reliable contact in order to respond to media requests in a timely manner.

Your organisation will need to work out how much staff time will be committed to the program. This will depend on the number of advocates you have and the media opportunities that come your way. Conversely, the amount of staff time and flexibility you dedicate will also define the capacity of the program – the more responsive you are able to be, the greater the stream of requests.

Consider how this will be managed prior to program implementation. Key questions include:

- If your organisation is only able to commit a limited number of hours to the program, how can media requests be dealt with in a timely way? Is this best achieved through a spread of hours across the week or responsibilities being shared by a couple of workers or organisations?
- How will worker leave be covered? Media requests will not stop because your staff member is on holiday.
- Will you respond to advocacy requests that are outside working hours?
- Can partnerships be formed and agreements made with other media advocacy projects to share media requests?

4.6.2 Program costs

Advocate training

Advocate training costs can be significant and must be considered in your planning. Due to the specialised nature of the training provided, it is likely you will need expert external trainers for at least part of the training. Additional costs may include venue hire, catering, training materials and funds to enable advocate participation such as reimbursement for child care or transport expenses. See the Voices for Change Facilitators Training Manual for further details on planning for advocate training.

Worker training

Program workers will need skills in responding to the media, building relationships, writing media releases, pitching stories and handling interviews, as well as a robust understanding of violence against women and its prevention. If they do not already have these skills, training will be essential. Some of these skills can be gained through the workers' participation in the advocate training sessions. Another cost effective way is to share media training with other organisations in your region or community that may be interested in learning more about working with the media. You may also want to run whole of organisation training so that all staff are equipped with some media skills.

Other costs may include:

- mobile phone for program workers for communication with media and advocates, and for safety purposes when out of the office
- travel costs for workers – petrol or public transport
- volunteer budget – becoming an advocate with an organisation is a volunteer role and you should consider reimbursement of costs that are involved as part of an advocacy opportunity. It is up to each organisation to consider how they will recognise the women involved, however compensating advocates is highly recommended and could include (at a minimum) reimbursement of travel costs, meals or snacks, or child care.
- ongoing program costs for training and supporting advocates including:
 - providing refresher training to practise their media and public speaking skills, develop key messages and access up-to-date statistics to strengthen their advocacy work.
 - establishing an advocate community through meetings for advocates to share learnings and stories and practise their key messages.

Questions to think about that may affect your budget:

- Are there organisational funds available to set up a Media Advocacy Program?
- Are there any grants that your organisation could apply for to develop the program, or for individual training sessions?
- Do you have staff capacity to run the program, or will you have to hire an additional staff member?
- Do you have a volunteer budget?
- Will you need to employ facilitators to deliver advocate training?
- Do you have an appropriate venue for advocate training and get togethers, or will you have to hire one?
- Will you charge a fee for public speaking engagements to cover some of the program costs?
- Are there other ways the program might generate income to cover costs such as reimbursement by advocacy organisers, donations, fundraising, or corporate partnerships?

For some examples of how the existing Media Advocacy Programs are funded, please see the case studies in [Section 2.2.1](#).

4.7 Partnerships

4.7.1 Reasons to partner

As a time intensive program that needs a diverse range of skills, expert knowledge and timely responses to media advocacy requests, it makes good sense to consider partnerships. Bringing together a combination of people with the right skills and knowledge may ensure the success of your program.

Partnerships can be an effective way to fill gaps in your organisation's capacity, extend the program's reach and build networks. It is wise to think about the ideal mix of partners for your program and start conversations with them early.

Benefits of partnerships include:

- Assistance with promoting the program to wider networks
- Sharing of program staffing commitments
- Expertise in the prevention of violence against women
- Access to experts to facilitate advocate training
- Recruitment and screening of potential advocates
- Counselling and support for advocates throughout the program

4.7.2 Potential partners

Depending on your organisation and its profile, and where you operate, potential partners could include:

- organisations with a gendered health promotion capacity such as women's health services
- sexual assault and family violence support organisations
- local media organisations
- local government
- community health or primary health care organisations
- funding providers
- philanthropic organisations
- other organisations running Media Advocacy Programs.

Depending on the women you are working with, organisations such as local Aboriginal organisations or organisations that work with women from culturally diverse backgrounds may play an important part in your recruitment and support of advocates, or in the delivery of training. [Section 5.1.2.1](#) provides further information on the diversity of advocates.

Other potential partners are media organisations themselves. Ensuring that you have developed relationships with the media is essential for placing advocate stories.

4.7.3 Types of partnerships

Partners can be involved in your Media Advocacy Program in a variety of ways, whether as a guest presenter at your advocate training or a member of a program steering committee.

For an example of the importance of partnerships and how they have helped shape Media Advocacy Programs, please see the case studies in [Section 2.2.1](#).

The VicHealth Partnership Analysis Tool² is a useful document to establish, develop and maintain partnerships.

References

- 1 North, L 2012, *Women's struggle for top jobs in the news media, Seizing the initiative: Australian women leaders in politics, workplaces and communities*, eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, http://www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/sti/pdfs/18_North.pdf
- 2 VicHealth 2011, The partnership analysis tool, VicHealth, retrieved 18 May 2015, <https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/the-partnerships-analysis-tool>