

Exercises: Issue Framing

What is Issue Framing?

Issue framing is how one defines an issue when presenting it to a specific group. Figuring out how to frame an issue and tailor your description for audiences can be a powerful way to show why it is important. The following exercise will help you think about how you frame abortion rights at the state level and consider how you can reach these groups based on their interests or angles that influence them.

Below are a number of exercises to help you:

- 1) Your Community Groups (pg. 1)
- 2) Identifying Cultural and Social Values (pg. 3)
- 3) Human Rights Flow Chart (pg. 4)
- 4) Influence Map (pg. 5)
- 5) Developing an Action Plan (pg. 6)

Exercise 1: Your Community Groups

- **Step 1: Think about your community.** Are you trying to organize preexisting support for abortion rights? Or are you trying to rally new support? The messages that you would use for these two groups can vary tremendously, so you must know where your audience stands on this topic.
- **Step 2: Consider why aren't they already with us.** Organize the people you're trying to influence into three different buckets: *"lost cause"*, *"educate"*, and *"common ground"*.
 - People in the **"lost cause"** bucket are those who are impossible or near impossible to influence, who staunchly oppose the right to abortion and are not interested in rational conversation on the topic. While you may wish to reach as many people as possible with your advocacy efforts, you must allocate your limited time and resources appropriately. It's better to use these resources on other groups that could be swayed, rather than wasting them on people who refuse to listen to your point of view.
 - People in the **"educate"** bucket are those who have not staunchly solidified their opinion on abortion rights, potentially because they don't know enough about abortion or the issues surrounding abortion. These people may require further education on the abortion procedure itself, why abortion is a human right, or why it is so important to protect the right to abortion for all Americans.
 - People in the **"common ground"** bucket are those who share similar values with abortion advocates but may not be involved with the abortion rights movement.
- **Step 3: Figure out your approach moving forward based on the group.** Think about the messages that are relevant to these specific groups of people who are not currently part of the abortion rights movement in your community and consider how you can use these messages to have dialogue with them and help influence them to support abortion rights – or support abortion rights more actively. Look at the examples below and consider how they could fit into the context of pro-abortion advocacy where you live.

Personal Freedoms

- The state of New Hampshire has had several abortion restriction bills introduced in the past year that would strip pregnant people of their personal freedoms. New Hampshire's motto is "Live Free or Die"- don't restrictions on personal freedoms and bodily autonomy directly go against the state's values? Why are other personal freedoms so cherished, but being able to decide what you do with your own body is not? How would you use this thinking to target folks in the **educate**

bucket who don't really support abortion rights but may have this value? Think of these types of angles and apply them to your own state's situation when speaking to your community members.

"Pro-life"

- People who oppose abortion often say that pregnant people can just easily carry out a pregnancy, give birth, and then give the baby up for adoption (or they think the pregnant person will always miraculously decide they will keep the baby once born). However, the people who believe this often don't understand how pregnancy can negatively impact people physically, mentally, and emotionally: pregnancy is associated with increased risks for a plethora of medical issues, the United States has the highest maternal mortality rate out of any developed country, and pregnant people can face serious mental health crises due to their pregnancy. These people claim to be "pro-life" but are not focused on the lives of pregnant people. Think creatively about these types of people in the **educate** bucket, and how you can communicate the ways that pregnancy can endanger people's physical and mental health.

Silent Supporters

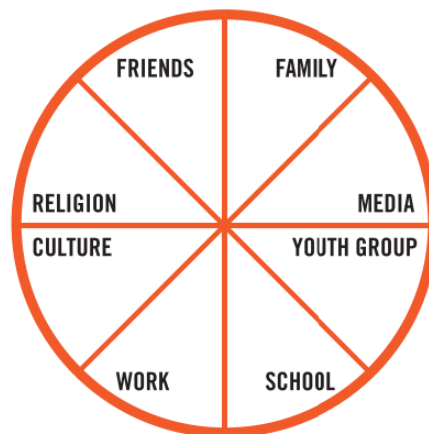
- Let's say you have a friend who has told you that they fully support abortion rights, believe that the stigma around abortion needs to be broken down, and they think that abortion should be legal and accessible across the United States. However, this person has never stated this to their family, on social media, or in any public forum. They fear that they will face backlash from loved ones if they voice their support or if they decide to join a pro-abortion advocacy group. Isn't it hypocritical, though, that they want to destigmatize abortion, but they aren't even willing to speak out about it over the fear of being personally stigmatized? Movements require action, no matter how small, and someone like your friend who shares **common ground** with your values must understand that silence does nothing to promote abortion rights. Your common ground with them is likely your shared commitment to a better world, or personal autonomy—talk with them about how important that shared ideal is and how we can all contribute to getting there. Consider what you can do to help your friend be more vocal about their views on abortion rights, and how they can get involved in pro-abortion advocacy in your area. What are ways THEY can use issue framing to say why abortion rights are important to them in a way that might reach their community.

(More exercises on the following pages)

Exercise 2: Identifying Cultural and Social Values

This is an exercise that you can use with a small group to identify some of the values that are commonly held within your community.

- **Step 1:** Draw a large circle on a piece on a flipchart or whiteboard. Ask the people in your group to think about where you get your values from, and consider things such as: judging things as either right or wrong, good or bad, what you should or should not do, etc. Examples might include:
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Partners
 - School
 - Religion
 - Traditions
 - Culture
 - Youth and other social groups
 - Media
 - Politics
 - Work
- **Step 2:** Divide the circle into sections and write one value source in each section. The chart will look something like this:

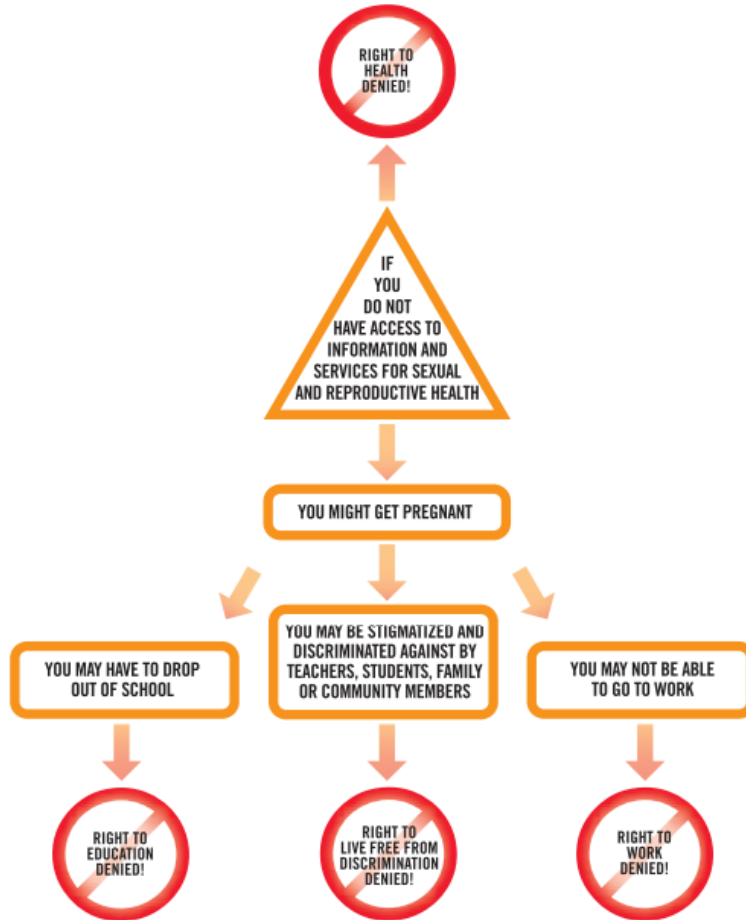


- **Step 3:** Working with your group, look at the circle and answer the following questions:
 - What messages do we get about abortion and bodily autonomy from this source?
 - What values come with these messages?

Possible messages from religion could be a leader from a specific religion saying “abortion is sinful”, which accompanies the value that abortion is wrong or bad. Different sources of values may provide different messages.

Exercise 3: Human Rights Flow Chart

If you're having a difficult time explaining why banning abortion is a human rights issue, you should try visualizing this topic. In this activity, you and members of a group are asked to think about how the denial of human rights can escalate into the denial of other rights or freedoms. Here is an example you can use to build your own flow chart:



Consider all the things that could be implicated in banning abortion, especially things like:

- Health
- Education
- Gender inequality
- Economic impacts
- Loss of other rights in the future

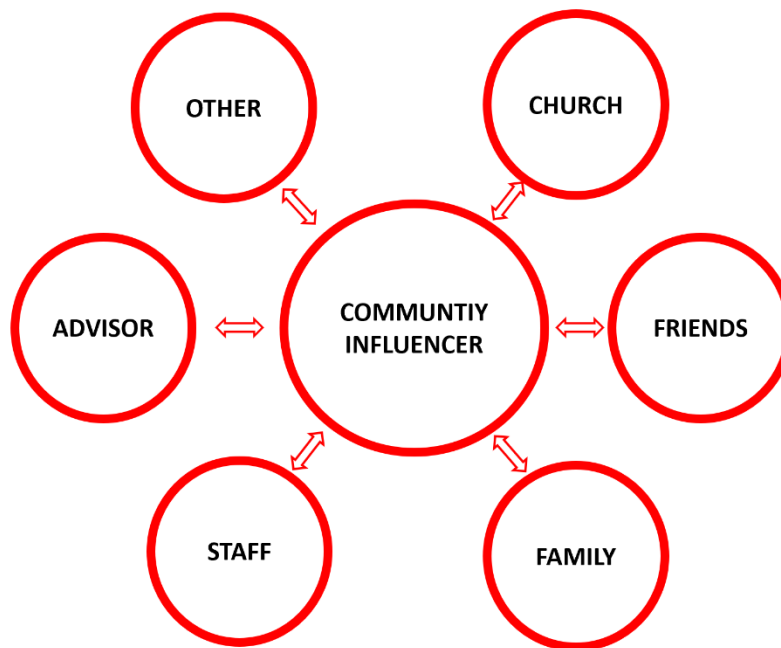
If you need more ideas on rights that could be denied by banning abortion, you can take a look at the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

Exercise 4: Influence Map

When you're advocating for abortion rights in your community, it's vital to understand the people who either make decisions, or who can influence large groups of people- they can help to change the dialogue around the topic of abortion. This influence map activity will help you and your group to think critically about the specific influencers in *your* community, and the ways they might possibly be swayed to publicly voice support for abortion rights.

Step 1: Think of the main decision makers and influencers in your community. Are they business owners? Religious leaders? Elders? Influencers can take many different forms, and it's important to figure out who they are, what they influence, and who influences *them*.

Step 2: Visualize this person's influence. Work with your group to identify people this influencer is connected to, and the degrees of influence they have over others, or that others have over them. Here's an example:



Step 3: List the top 3 groups that can sway the community influencer. Have a discussion and list the top groups that could sway this person.

Step 4: Make a plan. What opportunities exist to influence this person? Work with your team to brainstorm ideas on how you strategize and take advantage of those opportunities. The action planning template on the next page can help you with this.

Exercise 5: Developing an Action Plan

If you and your group members want to develop an action plan for engaging people in your community, you can print the following guide to plan your activities:

PLANNING HOW YOU WILL ACHIEVE CHANGE	
What is the sexual and reproductive rights issue you are focusing on?	
What specific problems will be addressed in this plan?	
Who is most affected by this issue? Why?	
What is the change you want to see happen? For example, young people understand their sexual and reproductive rights.	
What needs to happen to create this change? Think of a few small changes that will lead to achieving the big change. (For example, comprehensive sexuality education in schools will lead to young people being well-educated about sexual and reproductive rights.)	
What activities can we do to influence these changes? Think about activities that are realistic and that you can tell if you have achieved them. (For example, hold [a number of] sexuality education workshops.)	
How will you know you have achieved change?	
What are the risks, challenges or barriers to achieving the changes you want to see happen?	
Who will be helpful to you in carrying out your plan?	

Here are some questions you should consider when planning out your activities with your group:

FOR EACH ACTIVITY, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS	
What is your activity? Describe it in a sentence.	
When will your activity take place?	
Where will the activity take place?	
Who will be involved in your activity?	
What resources do you need? (Think people, equipment, money)	
How will you tell others about what you are doing?	
What are the challenges or barriers to the activity going well?	
How can you overcome these challenges or barriers?	