

NOW Issues / Who Speaks for the Organization

As a NOW chapter, you will find yourselves "in the news," even when perhaps you'd rather not be. Current events at the local, state and national level frequently bring calls from the media, asking for comment or background on topics relating to NOW issues, legislation, even last night's news. The best approach for the chapter is to determine who is going to speak to the press, and for that person to take whatever steps needed so that she can do the best possible job.

Please review the "Who Speaks for NOW" resolution, so that the chapter has a clear understanding of who is the spokesperson and why. If needed, request a copy of the Chapter Development Report #15 Effective Use of the Media. This report outlines some of the best ways for the chapter to get publicity. Additionally, the membership of a chapter, as well as its leadership, should be familiar and comfortable with NOW policy and positions. The attached sheet on NOW's priority issues could be a part of every new member packet. Chapters might have brainstorming sessions, using everyone's ideas for the best, most effective responses to controversial or tricky questions.

Above all, remember that NOW's issue positions are frequently used by the media to divide and embarrass, not only the feminist community, but our own membership as well. For example, if you "duck" questions about NOW's position on lesbian rights, you should realize that you are admitting that this is something you (and possibly your chapter) aren't completely comfortable with, perhaps even inadvertently sending a message to your opponents that you can be demoralized and discredited by simply bringing up that issue in a public forum. Best to sit down with your chapter members, talk something like this over, review all the facts, resolutions, etc. on our positions at hand, and have good, solid lines for reporters, folks who genuinely want to know, and your opponents.

Never hesitate to say to a reporter that you need information, that you need to verify what they are saying, or that you need to talk with your board or task force chair about the question at hand, and you'll call them back. Don't hesitate to call the National Action Center for background or the "press lines" our national leadership are using on a breaking news story. Never comment on something that "sounds" fishy or as if it has been taken out of context, or as if it might only be "part" of a longer statement or quote -- tell the reporter you'll get back to her/him and make some more calls.

We've also attached a summary of NOW's positions on some of the issues. There are others you should find out more about, like pornography/violence against women, child care and family leave, etc. You can purchase - or someone in your chapter or state may have a copy of -the NOW Issues Policy Manual. Use the enclosed Materials Order Information if you'd like to buy one.

As always, feel free to call or email the Field Team if you have questions.

WHO SPEAKS FOR NOW

(7/78 Policy statement adopted (from the NOW Administrative Policy Manual):

Public Speaking Policy -- National NOW policies are defined in the organization's Statement of Purpose, its Bylaws, resolutions passed at National Conferences and Conventions, and motions passed by the National Board. National officers are responsible for communicating these policies in every-member NOW publications so that current and new members may be aware of them. Members, in turn, are responsible for familiarizing themselves with those policies.

NOW affirms the right of every member to voice their own opinions on feminist issues in public or private, in NOW meetings or meetings of other organizations. We expect and encourage lively debate on the issues before us. That right must be distinguished, however, from the right to speak on behalf of NOW in public forums. In public presentations the following rules shall pertain:

- 1.** When the national organization has an established policy on a particular issue, officers of the national organization and its sub-units and members are obliged to state that policy when speaking or writing about that issue in any public forum. Members of NOW may speak for NOW only when authorized to do so by their unit.
- 2.** If a member has been, but no longer is, an officer in a unit of NOW, she/he must make clear in any public statement that current officers are the authorized spokespersons for that unit.
- 3.** When national policy has not been defined on a particular issue, spokespersons shall so state. Spokespersons must identify, in any public statement, which unit of the organization they represent. They must also adhere to any rules on public statements established by the units they represent. Such rules may limit public statements on behalf of those units, but not an individual's right to express their own opinions.

We urge all sub-units of NOW to establish rules on public statements on their actions and policies, if they have not already done so.

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