



BlackBallotPower

Make your voice heard: Advocacy for community organizations

What is advocacy?

"Advocacy"--efforts to directly influence policies of any government--is a strategy for making social change that complements organizing, development, service delivery, voter work.

Is it legal?

There are limits, though they are not exceptionally restrictive.

What are the benefits?

Advocacy can help build and broaden your constituency; develop new and energize old leaders; build relationships with other organizations; and increase your visibility, which can improve your fund raising.

What are the obstacles?

1. Staff are strapped for time. Who has time for advocacy?
 - ✓ This not easy as most community organizations are under-staffed and overworked. BUT advocacy must be part of what an organization does and not tacked on at the last minute. Free up the time of one staff person for half day or a day a week to do policy work, stay on top of legislation and keep other staff and constituents informed.
2. Foundations are often leery even afraid to fund organizing and advocacy. (Social service delivery feels safer.).
 - ✓ It is not illegal to use foundation money for advocacy.
 - ✓ Advocacy can be funded by money from individual donors and special events.
3. Organizations are too busy to insure there is a large group of constituents to back up their agenda.
 - ✓ No people, no change.

What are the basic steps to be successful?

1. Identify and build a constituency. Your success will depend enormously on the depth and breadth of your constituency. Many of the laws that we used to take for granted were won by mass movements grounded in disciplined organizations with large numbers of people who had a direct self-interest.
 - ✓ Educate your constituency on the issue.
 - ✓ Train your constituency to be skilled organizers and advocates.
 - ✓ Develop a winning strategy

2. Conduct a power analysis: How can we really move the targets? What are their political bases? Were their last elections close? Did they win because of poor and minority voters or, conversely, because these voters stayed home? Have they responded to our group in the past?
 - ✓ Define the key target that can give you a win: Who has the power to make the change you want to see? What is the process for the policy or regulatory change that you want to make? It could be legislators on the local, state or federal level, or perhaps, appointed state commissioners particular rule or regulation.
 - ✓ Identify your allies: organizations and people who share your goal. A network of allies (a coalition) can get out your message to a broader base and do it quickly. Don't forget other organizations, religious organizations, unions and advocacy groups, as well as political allies.
 - ✓ Create a timeline: Be reasonable and be patient. It may take longer than you think. Learn how local, state and federal legislatures work and when their sessions are.
3. Create materials
 - ✓ Make them clear and concise – people are too busy to read a lot of information.
 - ✓ Have the data to back up your issue and make certain it refers to their geographic area of representation.
 - ✓ Include your contact information and a list of your allies.

In short:

- **Enlist allies.** They will expect to have some ownership of the campaign. This may mean some visibility at a press conference, or involving them in strategy meetings.
- **Think big, but think it through:** When taking on a federal, state or regional public policy fight, forethought is even more important. .
- **Be persistent.**
- **Make all help welcome.**
- **Change what doesn't work, keep what does.** A good campaign will force an organization to do things it hasn't done before.
- **Get a public figure to help deliver your message** if you can.
- **Don't burn any bridges.** You never know who you may need to work with again.