

Public Policy Advocacy: *A Grassroots Guide*



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Introduction: Why this Guide?

We are at a sad place in our nation's history. "Advocacy" is a dirty word. "Advocates" are "special interest groups." (Somehow, CEOs and lobbyists for corporations and the wealthy escape this negative definition). Political involvement of average citizens is falling. We even have the lowest voter turnout in the world.

But you are reading this guide because you want to make a difference. You know that democracy is not a spectator sport. You want to change things for the better. You know that you can't score points – or make change – by sitting on the sidelines.

We wrote this guide to help you use the skills you already have to change government actions that affect your life. As an individual, you may wonder what you can do to change things. As a grassroots group, you may think that the deck is stacked against you. There are many things that may stand in your way. There are people and organizations that oppose justice. There are elected officials who listen to money instead of their constituents. But this guide, and the companion Guide to Media Advocacy, can help.

You may ask, "There are so many things that need to be changed. Where do I start? I'm just one person, or a member of one small group. How can I make anything happen?" It's important for you to become familiar with the critical advocacy steps that lead to the changes you want, and help you build a larger network of people who will share the burden- and joys! - of advocacy with you. That's the purpose of this guide: *to help you strengthen your individual and group capacity to engage in effective public policy advocacy to make our society more just.*

In our work, we are always guided by the words of Margaret Mead. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed [people] can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Small groups of committed individuals succeeded in passing the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Small groups of committed individuals got the vote for women. Small groups of committed individuals established Social Security, public schools, and labor rights. Your small group of committed individuals can make a big difference! *(See Appendix A for Selected List of Reference Organizations and Publications on Advocacy Issues.)*

Chapter I: What is Advocacy?

Webster's New World Dictionary defines "advocacy" as advocating, speaking, or writing in support of something. An "advocate" is a person who speaks or writes in support of something. Under this definition, we are all advocates. Our child advocates for a later bedtime. We advocate with a neighbor to quiet their dog so we can sleep.

Our every-day advocacy often changes over time. We ask our neighbor politely to quiet their dog. If they don't, we might write them a letter. If that doesn't work, we might call or write the landlord. If we still don't get results, we might call the police, moving up the "chain of command."

Public policy advocacy works on the same principles. In public policy advocacy, we use a *variety of organized tactics to achieve our goal*. If we aren't satisfied by the answer we get at the first step, we move up the chain of command until we reach the person or institution that has the final say. In public policy advocacy, we aren't asking for a change to just benefit our family or ourselves. Instead, we are asking for a change that will improve the lives of many people, including people that we will never meet.

Characteristics of Public Policy Advocacy

Public policy advocacy has several important characteristics.

- Advocacy *asks something* of others – individuals, groups, or institutions.
- Advocacy *puts the demands of people* into political and policy systems.
- Advocacy *deals with issues and conflicts* that might otherwise be ignored.
- Advocacy *involves people* who have an interest in a government decision.
- Advocacy *creates a space* for public argument and discussion.
- Advocacy *finds solutions* to problems.

Focus for Public Policy Advocacy

Three branches of government set public policy in the United States. The *legislature* (the U.S. Congress, State legislatures, City Councils, etc.) passes laws. The *Executive Branch* signs legislation into law (President, Governor, Mayor) and administers or enforces laws (departments, agencies, commissions, Boards). The *judiciary* (courts) interprets the laws and makes sure they are consistent with the United States and state constitutions. Depending on our goal, the focus of our advocacy will change. But the tools we use will often be the same.

Chapter 2. An Advocacy Overview

This guide is about *social justice advocacy* - making changes that improve the lives of people who are unfairly treated in our society. Social justice advocates are not like lobbyists for corporations, who act solely out of self-interest. Social justice advocates work toward a *vision of a just and decent society for all people*. We see firsthand the direct impact that unjust policies have on our communities, and why. We see that our stories, experiences, and ideas are not usually part of the public conversation about public policy. So we use numbers, analysis, experience, interviews and information from our communities to tell the untold story. We use these stories to influence public attitudes that have been shaped by a society that is not about justice. We don't just complain about the way things are, we also offer workable solutions.

But we aren't naïve. We know that social change doesn't happen just because it's right. Our arguments for change must be both compelling on the merits and have the political punch to support our demands. We organize our advocacy strategies to take into account power relationships – who has the power? how can they be pressured or persuaded to act in a more just way? We use the *instruments of democracy* – elections, lobbying, mobilizing, organizing, civil disobedience, negotiating, bargaining, and litigation – to reveal and influence issues that are too often ignored or misrepresented. Our sources of power in these battles are our persistence, our people, our creativity, our hands-on knowledge, and the emotional pull of our stories.

Social justice advocacy is also about making sure that the people who are directly affected by an issue are part of the process of change. Social justice advocates strive to reflect the kind of society we are working for. We draw our strength from and are accountable to our members, constituencies, and affected groups. We work to gain access and voice for affected groups in powerful institutions, challenging the power of those institutions. And we are willing to take the risks – physical, emotional, psychological, economic, political, and/or organizational - that challenging power entails. At the same time, we take steps to assure that we – ourselves, our organizations, our members, and our constituents – are supported as much as possible.

Finally, we hold ourselves to high standards. Are we changing the public debate? Are we bringing new voices in? Do our solutions work? Are we improving people's lives? Are systems becoming more just and accountable? If not, what else must we change?

[Adapted from Critical Lessons Learned in Social Justice Advocacy, by David Cohen, Director of the Advocacy Institute]

Chapter 3. Vision, Mission, and Goals

Every effective advocacy campaign starts with a shared *vision, mission, and goals*. Your *vision* is your picture of what the ideal situation would look like. For example, your vision may be that every family has decent housing, medical care, and employment. Of course, that is a long way off, and it doesn't tell you how to get there. Your *mission* is a summary of what you or your organization will do to make that vision a reality.

The **vision** of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of New Jersey (SPAN-NJ) is a world that maximizes the healthy development and education of every child, so that all children are fully participating and contributing members of our communities and society. The **mission** is to “empower families and inform and involve professionals and other individuals interested in the healthy development and education rights of children.”

You also need to decide on short- and long-term *goals and objectives*. *Goals* are significant steps toward reaching your vision. A *long-term goal* might be legislation guaranteeing universal healthcare, which could take years. A *shorter-term goal* might be to expand State Children's Health Insurance Programs (SCHIP) to include the parents of eligible children. A *very short-term goal* should be something that you can accomplish in the next three months. An example might be to increase the percentage of eligible children who are actually participating in the SCHIP program.

Your *objectives* are the means by which you will accomplish the goals. They are short-range, expected outcomes that are specific, measurable, achievable, and consistent with the goals. *Activities* or *action steps* are the actual concrete steps to be taken to carry out the objectives. Activities are tracked by *action plans*, which identify the resources, constraints, and timelines needed, as well as clear indicators of success by which the accomplishment of the activities can be measured. *Action steps* answer these questions: What is to be done? Who is responsible? When is it to be accomplished?

As you develop your *vision, mission, and goals*, you need to identify each level of the institutional system that is relevant to your advocacy effort, for example, federal, state, county and local. Look at your *priorities for change* in policies, practices, and resource allocations. What are the most critical and problematic current situations that need your attention? What are the desired changes that you most want to bring about?

Remember, effective advocacy campaigns don't just complain about existing problems. They also offer solutions. That's why a *vision and goals* are so important. They help people understand what they are working *for*, not just what they are fighting *against*.

Chapter 4. How Change Happens and Who Makes it Happen

The Stages of Change

In today's world, it is not enough to have a vision, goals, or even passion. You must also understand *how change happens* and *who makes it happen*.

As Frederick Douglas said, "Power concedes nothing without a *demand*. It never has and never will." The status quo is like a huge rock that will never be set in motion without a push. Once the demand for change has been made, powerful institutions typically go through a series of stages aimed at avoiding or minimizing change.

The first stage is usually *denial* of the need for change. "If I wait long enough, the demand for this change will go away."

The second stage is *resistance* to the change. Resistance can take many forms, but it usually includes attacking the people who are suggesting the change, and blaming the people who would benefit from the change for their own problems. "You must be a communist if you think the taxes of the wealthy should be given to the poor." "Poor people are lazy, and should just pull themselves up by their bootstraps."

The third stage only happens if enough pressure has been put on the decision-makers. *Exploration* involves asking questions about how to make change within the confines of existing government budgets; whether and how specific laws or regulations will need to be revised; and the best way to build wider public support for the change.

Policy-makers often also seek to *manage* the change. This can involve trying to limit the extent to which the change really affects the root causes of the problem(s). It can also mean trying to limit the structural changes that have to be made in affected government agencies (the number or roles of staff, etc.), the laws or regulations that will have to be rewritten, and/or the number of people who will be "adversely" affected by the change (for example, the number of people whose taxes will have to go up).

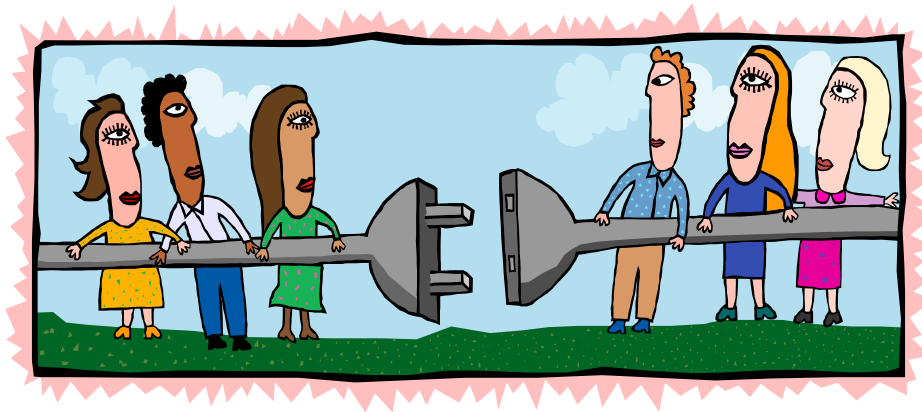
The final stage is *collaboration*, *compromise*, and *maintaining momentum*. Once you have persuaded the policy-makers that change is needed and inevitable, you work closely with them to help shape the new policy, rules, and structures. You may find yourself collaborating with the very people and institutions you were attacking at earlier stages of your campaign. This stage also involves *compromise*, which can be very difficult, especially when the end result is not as positive and far-reaching as your vision. This is why it's so important that the final stage also focus on *maintaining momentum*. You may have won key concessions, and it's important to recognize the improvements that will be made. But it's also essential to keep an eye on the prize, to regroup, and to figure out what your next step is to keep you moving toward your vision. If you don't, you run the risk of losing everything you have accomplished as opposing advocates work to undermine or reverse the changes. *Effective advocates never rest on their laurels!*

Agents for Change

You are reading this guide because you are interested in advocating for larger change that improves the lives of others. *You are a “change agent.”* “Change agents” may:

- Advocate on an individual basis (i.e., go to a fair hearing for another recipient).
- Act as a catalyst for new ideas.
- Think about systems that affect poor people and how they fit and work together.
- Help others understand how change happens.
- Coordinate activities aimed at making change.
- Help others work as a team.
- Facilitate the sharing of information with decision-makers.

“Change agents” also *listen, learn, respond, advocate, pursue, intervene, team* and *facilitate*. You *listen* to your constituents, staff and administrators of government agencies, legislators and other policy makers, and other organizations and advocates. You *learn* about social, economic, political, historical, and other factors that affect individuals and groups because of their identity. You *respond* to important questions and needs. You *advocate* for constituent concerns. You *pursue* multiple channels for change. You *intervene* at the system level, not just in individual cases. You *team* with others interested in change. You *facilitate* needed discussions and actions. You help *build the consensus and momentum needed for change*.



Chapter 5. Your Strategic Plan

Once you understand how the change process works, you can begin to develop a *strategic plan* to make the changes you want. Your strategic plan helps you identify the resources you have, the resources you need, and what you hope to accomplish. It helps you establish priorities for your limited resources. It ensures that everyone in your group is “on the same page.” It creates an organization- or movement-wide focus that directs, motivates, and inspires everyone involved.

The Process of Developing your Strategic Plan

When developing a strategic plan, set ground rules that are clearly understood by everyone. *If you have a question, ask it; there are no dumb questions, just mistakes that are made because the questions weren't asked. Share your experiences and opinions, but don't take up all the conversation space. Be informal and relaxed, so your creative juices can flow. Know that all opinions count and are valued.* Keep it simple, so that everyone feels that they can contribute. Share the process and questions in advance of the “retreat” or meeting, so people who need more time to think will be able to participate.

It is important to involve as many key people and organizations as you can when you are developing your strategic plan. Keep in mind that:

- No one person can have a complete handle on the whole strategy. You need to make sure that each person gets a chance to add their piece to the jigsaw puzzle.
- Group process in strategy development must allow frank criticism of ideas without personal attacks or defensiveness. The important thing is to develop a strategy that works. Building trust is essential for an effective group process.
- Strategic planning is most effective when people can learn to think long-term as well as short-term; can see the whole picture as well as the individual pieces; and work collaboratively, instead of in isolation.

There are several important tools you can use to get broad input into your strategic plan. For example, people can “*brainstorm*” in small groups or in the group as a whole. When brainstorming, it's important to record *all* ideas, encourage *everyone* to provide input, and accept *all* ideas without debate. When people “shoot down” things that other people say, they cut off access to valuable information and ideas. As Roger Van Oech said, “There are precious few Einsteins among us. Most brilliance arises from ordinary people working together in extraordinary ways.” It usually takes the insight, experiences, expertise and creativity of lots of people to make a group extraordinary! Another approach is for each person to write down their ideas, and then discuss them in a small group. The ideas from the small group are then “reported out” to the larger group for discussion. This provides an opportunity for participation for people who dislike speaking in large groups. It also gives people a chance to “try out” their ideas in a safer, smaller “community” before exposing them to the entire group.

If you think that there may be strong differences among people, it is a good idea to have the strategic planning session(s) facilitated.

Strategic Planning Format

One effective tool for developing a strategic plan is the following model that asks ten important questions.

1. What do you want?

This question asks you to identify your “objectives.” What’s wrong with the current situation, and why? What do you want to happen differently as a result of your work? How do you want real people’s lives to change? This question involves both *content* and *process* goals. *Process goals* might include getting more low-income families actively involved in your campaign, demystifying the state budget process, and changing the way the media reports on your issue. Your *content* or *policy goal* is the outcome that you want. For example, your content goal might be to increase the welfare grant to a livable level, or to pass a minimum guaranteed income for all families.

2. Who can deliver it?

This question asks you to consider the *audiences* you will be working with, the “targets” of your advocacy. Who has formal authority to make the decisions you want? Who can influence those with formal authority? For example, the governor and the legislature are *formal authority*. There are many individuals and institutions that can influence them. Voters, the media, businesses, churches, banks, unions, service providers, all can impact the decisions of the people with formal authority. Which of these will be for you, and which against you? Who has the greatest power over those with formal authority?

Who are the groups and individuals who oppose the key changes? Be specific. What key individuals have the power to give us critical changes on which our activities focus? What are our key activities for using the mass media (TV, newspapers, radio)? What are our key activities for using our own media? (Reports, newsletters, websites, etc.)

3. What do they need to hear?

This question focuses on the message(s) you will deliver to different audiences. To be effective, your message must contain relevant facts, delivered in a way that touches and moves the people you want to reach. It’s important to focus on *self-interest* as well as *public interest* arguments. What does each of your audiences care about? How do you need to talk to them to make them care about your issue, and support your solution? To answer this question, you need to find out information about how policy-makers have acted in the past. What kinds of laws have they sponsored or opposed? You also need to find out information about the individuals and institutions that can influence them. Is your issue related to any of their priorities? Are they already working on the same issue, either for or against you? What is their mission and vision? These answers will help you shape your message to have the best chance of reaching each audience.

4. Who do they need to hear it from?

Your message needs messengers to deliver it. Different messengers are more effective with different audiences. A doctor may have more credibility with the medical association that you want to lobby for increased funding for food. When you think about messengers, consider both “*expert*” and “*authentic*” voices. “*Experts*” are people that the larger society sees as having special knowledge in an area. An “*authentic*” voice is someone directly affected by the issue. For example, you may want to show that the current welfare grant does not give families enough money to live. A university researcher could be an “*expert voice*” on the cost of living in your community. A mother struggling to get by on welfare would be an “*authentic voice*” on how far her welfare check actually stretches. Both of these voices are important. The voice of the university researcher provides necessary facts, but might be dry and unemotional. The voice of the mother will touch the hearts of the legislator or the general public.

It’s also important to include “*authentic voices*” because of the myth that poor people cannot speak for themselves. Long-term change in how the public views poverty will only happen if the faces and voices of the poor, speaking for themselves, become a part of the public debate.

5. How do we get them to hear it?

This question focuses on the means of delivery of your message. You need a good balance of *persuasion* and *pressure*. You use facts, research and reports, human-interest stories, and ideas to *persuade* people that your issue is important and your solution will work. (See [The Savvy Guide to Media](#) for helpful hints on using the media to persuade those with formal authority and the general public). You use coalitions, organizing, mobilizing, lobbying, etc. to *pressure* decision-makers to change policies for the better.

6. What do we have to build on?

This question asks you to consider the tools you already have for advocacy. When you consider this part of the strategic plan, be sure you include:

- *Leadership*: What resources do we have available in terms of spokespeople, staff, knowledgeable and committed volunteers? What are our key strengths and areas for improvement regarding our own advocacy leadership?
- *Supporters*: Who are our current supporters? What authentic and expert voices, decision-makers, and decision-influencers are already on our side? What individuals and organizations are part of our initial core team? Consider the following potential supporters: children and families affected by the policy you want to change, administrators, community based organizations and advocacy groups, national, state, and local officials, community institutions (churches, schools, etc.) that serve constituencies affected by the policy, and other professionals who work at family-serving private or government agencies.
- *Information*: What are our key priorities and activities for documenting problems and solutions related to the improvements we seek? What are our key priorities and activities for analyzing the levels of the system(s) we are trying to change? What information do we need and how will we obtain it? There are many different kinds of information you may need, from existing research, facts, documentation from

many sources, including the people directly affected as well as universities, government reports, etc. Sharing anecdotes, stories of how current policy affects real people, can be very powerful. But anecdotes alone will not help you understand the full scope of the problem or what the most effective solutions will be. You need to gather, catalog, and examine existing data. You may also want to conduct a formal assessment, using surveys, interviews, government reports, and research studies. You may use “action research,” which is a way to get affected communities directly involved in documenting the problems, their impact on real people, and proposed solutions.

- *Resources:* Resources include people, money, space, and access to equipment like copiers, phones, etc.
- *Tools:* Tools include existing laws and regulations that support your vision or goals, committees or task forces that are charged with investigating the issue and developing recommendations, constituency groups that have formal consultation and advisory roles, etc.
- *Access* (to media, to decision-makers, to influential people, etc.)
- *Messages* (to the public, the media, supporters and potential supporters, decision-makers and those with influence over them, etc.)

7. What do we need to develop?

You must also identify the gaps in people, information, expertise, infrastructure, support, etc. Who else do you need to involve? How can you get access to that critical information and expertise? How can you build your organizational infrastructure so it can support this advocacy effort? Who can help you?

What specific groups or individuals do we want to build into a highly committed constituency with an intense dedication to making the key changes? Who are potential supporters? What specific groups or individuals do we want to build into a support network that can provide various kinds of help? What activities are we carrying out to build a committed constituency and/or a support network? What success are we experiencing in mobilizing people for sustained activism?

There is nothing more frustrating for an organization, or for the people it is helping, than to have to abandon a campaign before it has really gotten off the ground. That’s what happens when you try to make change without making sure that you have what you need to be successful. Unsuccessful advocacy campaigns contribute to a sense of defeatism and hopelessness by the people they intended to help. They also strengthen the resolve of your opponents.

8. How do we begin?

An ancient Chinese proverb says, “A journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.” In public policy advocacy, you have your long-term vision. But you also have shorter-term goals that build toward your vision. For an effective advocacy campaign, you want to identify a first effort that is big enough to matter, but small enough to achieve. It lays the groundwork for future action. It is symbolic. It builds your base. It engages the public. It gives your members and supporters a sense that change is

possible. It encourages and renews you. And it makes the people with formal authority sit up and pay attention!



A welfare rights coalition in New York City had a long-term goal to increase the welfare grant. As a short-term goal, it wanted recipients to receive all the funds to which they were already entitled. The law already provided for “catastrophic funds” for recipients who lost clothing, housing, etc. due to a catastrophe, such as a flood or fire. However, caseworkers were not telling recipients about this provision of the law. So the coalition members researched the law, got copies of the forms that recipients had to use to report catastrophic loss, and developed an information brochure on how to complete the form. Coalition members brought copies of the form and the brochure to welfare offices and helped recipients fill the forms out and turn them in. Many recipients received funds to replace clothing, furniture, and other essentials. Word of the success of this effort spread like wild fire through welfare offices and communities. More and more recipients started coming to community meetings organized by the coalition. They were energized and enthusiastic. Something could be done to help improve their lives! The success of advocacy efforts toward the short-term goal helped build their support for the longer-term goal – and made the city welfare officials wake up and take notice of the advocacy group. The advocacy coalition and their allies eventually succeeded in getting the welfare grant significantly increased.

supporters with the campaign to change policies, practices, experiences and results. What are our action interventions going to be? This is where you list the key intervention activities you are carrying out or plan to carry out, such as pressing for formal policy decisions by local government, lobbying state legislators, holding demonstrations or marches, pressing for specific regulations, filing formal complaints, using investigative reports to dramatize problems. List specific actions in the order you plan to use them.

9. How do we know it's working?

Evaluation is important to advocacy. If you wanted your landlord to clean up the fire escape, you would know you were successful only if the fire escape actually got cleaned up. You have to constantly evaluate your advocacy efforts to make sure that you are moving in the right direction; you can't wait until the effort is over to check out your progress. You might need a mid-course correction. Ongoing evaluation is also important to boost morale. You can celebrate small measurable victories along the way.

Your evaluation needs to look at implementation of your strategy, and the effectiveness of your strategy in actually making change happen. If things aren't going the way you planned them, you need a way to find out whether your planned strategy was wrong, your implementation was faulty, or your goal is not reachable at this time. *You have to be flexible in letting go if you need to.*

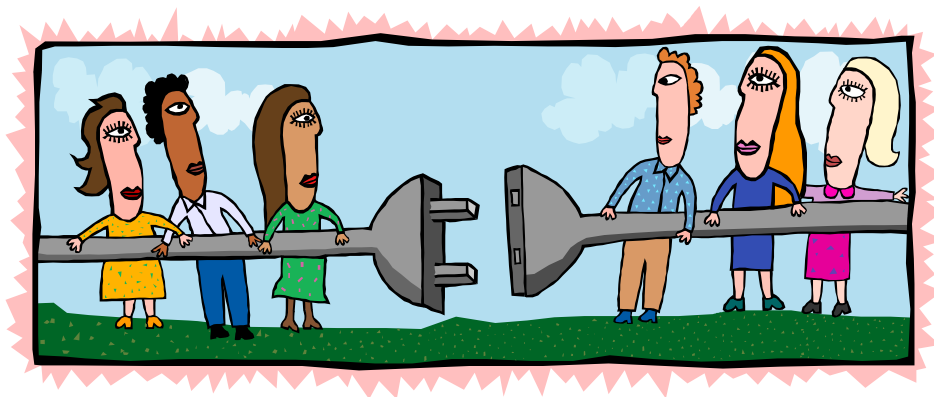
When evaluating your advocacy campaign, consider whether you have actually *implemented your plan*. Have you created the training and organizational materials? Have you successfully reached out to families that you want to involve? Have you built a strong coalition? Did you send the 1,000 letters to the legislators that you projected?

You must also consider whether the campaign has led to any *increase in engagement* of the people directly affected by the policy. Are you building, expanding, strengthening constituency leadership? Are more "authentic voices" part of the policy debate?

Successful advocacy campaigns also lead to *changes in policies and practices*. Did the law change? Were the regulations strengthened? Is the agency providing stronger enforcement? The bottom line is changes in outcomes and quality of life for affected constituencies. Was your proposed solution a good one? Now that it's been implemented, are things better?

10. Where do we go from here?

What are the next steps? You have won victories along the way, but there is always more to do. How are you going to make the next improvements a reality? Change in and of itself is not always a good thing. It's only when change is directed at improving the experiences and quality of life for all families that it makes sense. So when working to change an institution, it's critical that you identify solutions that will be meaningful and effective, that will improve outcomes, increase constituency involvement and participation, and have a lasting impact. If you keep these key questions in mind, you will never lose sight of your goal, and your advocacy efforts will be more likely to improve the quality of life and outcomes for children and families in our communities.



Chapter 6. Organizing Information and Conducting Research

James Madison once said, “Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own government must arm themselves with the power that knowledge brings.” To be an effective advocate, you must know more about your issue than anyone else, including those who oppose you and those who support the status quo. Acting before researching can waste time and money. It can also reinforce the stereotype of your constituency as highly vocal, but uninformed. When researching:

- Find as many sources of information about the issue as possible. Possible sources include existing reports from government agencies, institutions of higher education, and other advocacy groups; the people who are directly affected; community institutions and organizations that work with people who are directly affected; the staff of agencies who administer programs addressing the targeted issue; community newsletters and local newspapers; books; the internet.
- Research the arguments both for and against; know who supports and who opposes your position.
- Conduct surveys (see *Appendix B*), opinion polls, public forums, focus groups, and listening sessions among affected constituencies and in larger communities.
- Identify community assets and resources to address the problem or issue, including grassroots and community-based organizations, institutions (schools, colleges, hospitals or clinics, etc.), and other groups that might be interested in the issue.

If you develop it thoughtfully, a survey or questionnaire to your constituents can be an educational tool. If you ask people simply whether they are satisfied, they may answer “yes” because they don’t know what their rights are. On the other hand, if you tell them what should be happening, and then ask them whether or not their rights are being respected, you may get a more detailed and informed answer! It’s also important to get feedback from your constituents about what changes are important and feasible.



Chapter 7. Educating and Building your Constituency and Supporters

Getting and Keeping People Involved in Public Policy Advocacy

We often hear, “It’s hard to get people involved.” Life today can be hard. People get to spend little enough time with their families. People have two jobs, or dead-end make-work jobs. People are exhausted by the daily grind. People feel hopeless. Our organizing has to help them deal with their practical realities, as well as encouraging and supporting their participation in a broader movement for more systemic change.

There are some very successful ways to increase involvement in advocacy. People will *get involved* if they believe that the issue is important to them and their family; they have something to contribute; they will be listened to and their contributions will be respected; and their participation will make a difference. People will *stay involved* if:

- There are multiple opportunities for participation, from a small contribution of time and effort to progressively larger contributions of time and effort. The level of participation can vary, depending on life circumstances.
- They receive sufficient advance notice of participation opportunities.
- Their participation is facilitated (child care, transportation, dinner).
- Their participation is listened to; their ideas are supported and respected.
- There is no retribution for participation, or if there is retribution, there is support for them and a forum and mechanism for addressing that retribution.
- Their participation has an impact/makes an appreciable difference.
- Their participation is appreciated and that appreciation is acknowledged.

There are many ways that people who are directly affected by a government policy can contribute to your advocacy efforts. They can give you permission to share their stories with policy makers. They can talk about their stories in a small group (like a focus group). They can tell their stories directly to policy makers at a public hearing, a meeting, or at a forum that you organize. They can share their stories in writing, through a letter to the appropriate agency, a legislator, a newspaper, or to your group.

As people become more involved, they can play an important role in reaching out to encourage participation of their friends and other constituents. They can assist in the collection of documentation. For example, they can go to their neighborhood welfare center and interview recipients. They can help analyze the information that you receive. And they can help spread the word, to other constituents, to their neighbors, their schools, their friends, newspapers, etc. *Help them find their voice, and they’ll help you!*

Mobilizing your Constituents and the Broader Public for Advocacy

Mobilization moves people from spectators to participants, getting them to turn their opinions into actions. Because of all the other pressures on people’s time, participating in short-term mobilizing activities (showing up at a hearing, participating in a one-shot demonstration, writing a letter) is the most that many people can offer.

Mobilization can help people feel a part of something larger and more powerful and meaningful than they can feel alone. It offers people a chance to “get into the loop;” it raises awareness, it stimulates, it activates. Successful mobilization experiences energize people and make them more likely to want to participate in future actions. Mobilization can identify new bodies and minds to help your advocacy campaign, and build a larger core of the committed to shoulder the leadership of your movement.

There are a variety of ways to inform people about issues or activities around which you want them to “mobilize.” *Mobilization outreach* presents information about an activity or event in which people are asked to participate (training, demonstration, meeting, call-in show, letter writing or postcard campaign). Your outreach has two audiences: people who already are your allies, constituency, and members; and potential allies/ participants, those who share your position or could be persuaded to do so. Often you reach out to those populations with very different approaches.

There are many ways to reach your constituents and potential allies. You might reach out to your *existing constituency and allies* by calling your phone tree, starting your telephone, fax or e-mail tree, sending a letter or newsletter to your mailing list, discussing an event at a coalition meeting, and telling individual constituents about the mobilization activities in person through leaflets and conversation.

To reach other *potential constituents*, you can door-knock in communities that are affected by your issues. You can ask existing members to invite others. You can go to the places your constituents have to go (for example, the welfare office; the food pantry; etc.) You can go to the meetings of other groups affecting your constituency. You can reach out using media that your constituency reads or listens to. You can advertise using mass media (but that’s pretty expensive!) You can ask “mediating institutions” (like schools) to disseminate information about your group and your interest in reaching people who are affected by that issue. You can speak at public forums attended by your constituents and the broader public.

Potential new allies must be identified, found, contacted, and persuaded. To identify them, you need to strategize about the different groups who might share a concern about this issue/campaign with you. Once you’ve identified them, you can use paid advertisements, community announcements, coverage in local papers, radio, television, leafleting, posting, getting an ally to let you use their mailing list, etc. You can get constituents that you work with directly to reach out to others through word of mouth. You can get your members and constituents to reach out to members of other organizations they belong to. You can put signs up in libraries and on storefronts.

Whenever you have an opportunity to meet your constituents and potential supporters, collect their names, addresses, phone numbers, and any other ways to contact them. Have sign-in sheets and at your meetings and events. At events organized by others, ask people to add their name, address, and phone number to petitions, surveys, and requests-for-information about your issue. You need this information so you can mobilize them to participate in public policy advocacy activities. Make sure you hand

out information about your group, your priorities, your activities, and how to reach you to get more information or to get involved.

Your outreach must provide *information and education* to those you are trying to mobilize, in ways that are tailored to meet the various interests of the constituencies you are trying to motivate to action. Even that first phone call to an already-established ally has to indicate what it is you are mobilizing people for, why it's important to them and their community, some essential facts (what's the current problem, what's a possible solution, why this mobilization will help move toward the solution), maybe even who else is involved or sponsoring the mobilization. The level of detail required will vary depending on the relationship of that person or group to your issue.

You also need to know the realities of their lives and needs, so that you can identify obstacles to their participation. You may need to convince them that they don't have to be afraid to participate (that they won't be arrested, their children won't be taken away, they won't be fired). You may need to provide orientation or training so that they feel more comfortable and prepared to engage in the mobilization. You may need to provide child care, a place to meet, transportation, travel reimbursement, translators, sample letters, etc. You need to demonstrate to the mobilization is likely to lead to something positive (even if it's not an immediate big victory).

The effectiveness of particular mobilization tactics varies in different communities and with different constituencies, based on issues like poverty, culture, language, immigrant status/documented vs. undocumented, women vs. men, age differences, etc. In some communities it's ineffective to do a mobilization campaign based solely on notifying people of upcoming events by phone or mail. Many constituents in these communities have mailboxes that are constantly broken into, don't have telephones, and/or have very low literacy. When trying to mobilize immigrant communities, you may have to overcome a cultural barrier of non-participation, based on real-life experiences of harsh punishment for engagement in advocacy, as well as fear of getting involved because of the Immigration & Naturalization Service. Your group may be composed of people from the communities you are targeting; if not, you need to rely on help from community organizations serving those communities, who understand the barriers, and who know the mobilization tactics that work.

Your Action Alert Network

As government bills or regulations pass through legislatures or agencies, amendments or changes can be proposed that will be decided on within days or even hours. You won't have the time to educate people who need a lot of information, or persuade them to act. You need to have access to people who know the basic principles, and have already committed to act when called upon, even with short notice. One key strategy for effective mobilization of large groups of people is an "Action Alert Network."

One advocacy agency conducts "Parents Engaged in Public Policy" trainings for people who express an interest in their issues and agree to be part of the "Action Alert Network." Their names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mails are added to an "Action Alert" list. Whenever critical issues come up that need immediate action, the Network is activated by mailing or e-mailing an "Action Alert." The "Action Alert" contains a summary of the proposed legislation or action, positive and negative aspects of the proposal, key points to make, and information on who to contact and how. It asks Network members to share the information with friends and neighbors, and to send a copy of

When you develop an Action Alert Network, find out in advance the amount of time and energy each member can give, and what they are willing to do (call, write, show up on person). This will help you target your outreach to your Network, and will avoid turning Network members off by asking for more than they are able or willing to give.

Organizing

This brief guide is not a primer on community organizing. But as you engage in public policy advocacy, you need to be aware of the importance of longer-term organizing in building a base to persuade and pressure decision-makers to make the decisions you want. *Mobilizing* increases the strength of your organized constituency by supplementing them with larger numbers. But mobilizing is usually not long-term; once the event or activity is over, those who have been mobilized need to be mobilized again for the next activity. (It may be easier to mobilize them again since they've already been introduced to your group, issue, etc.)

When you move from *mobilizing* to *organizing*, you build a group of people that's easily mobilized for a particular activity; that can help mobilize others; that can carry out all the other pieces of a campaign; that can help think about what to do next; and that have access to new groups of people to mobilize and organize. That's one reason it's so important to make space within your mobilization campaign for new voices and ideas. Respect the knowledge and experience of those who are being mobilized, and develop ways to capture potential participants in longer-range activities and help build their leadership – and you will begin to move from *mobilizing* to *organizing*.



Chapter 8. Identifying and Building Leadership for Public Policy Advocacy

Building New Leadership for Advocacy

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that new leadership will just arise naturally. You have to nurture it. You have to develop a plan to identify new leadership and build their capacity. You must make space for people interested in leadership to demonstrate their interest, and you must provide support and leadership development to help them be effective. You should neither assume that someone has no knowledge or skills, nor that they are immediately ready to jump into leadership positions. Remember that you made mistakes along the way; sometime those mistakes were your most valuable teachers. Having opportunities to practice leadership in real situations is the only way that new leadership is developed.

To build new leadership, you have to meet and talk with constituents, sharing information, listening carefully to their strengths, needs and concerns. During meetings, you have to specifically recognize the value of their participation and contributions. You have to make sure that there is space for everyone to contribute. And you have to do all this while respecting the differing methods that people have of coping and adjusting to difficult situations, as well as all their other obligations to their families and to survival.

You will build new leadership if you provide the supports that people need to participate fully. Have meetings at times and places that are convenient for constituents

and potential leaders. If you can, compensate people for their time, expertise, and expenses. At a minimum, provide stipends, travel expenses, and child care. Clearly identify a primary contact, someone they can get to know and feel comfortable with. Match veteran group members with inexperienced ones for support and to share ideas. If you want new members to speak up at public meetings, make sure that they have the information they need before the meeting. Give them opportunities to ask questions and talk issues over before they are expected to speak in public. Provide orientations to new members about the issues, key people, and the process for participation.

It's also important to be ready to hear what new people say, about the issues, about your group, and about the work you've done so far. This may be difficult, because you've invested a lot of time and energy, and you believe you are doing the right thing. But often the "outsider's" perspective is invaluable, because it can be more objective.

Key Advocacy Leadership Qualities

Sometimes we have a very narrow idea of "leadership." When we think of leaders, we often think of dynamic people who are motivational speakers. But there are many different kinds of leaders and many different ways to lead. Advocacy leadership simply means inspiring and helping people to work toward a public policy goal. It doesn't have to mean taking charge. As a leader, you need to strengthen your own leadership, so that you can help grow new leadership from your constituents and members.

Advocacy leaders can be:

- *Role models and mentors*;
- *Visionaries* who think long-term;
- *Strategists* who choose the part of the vision that is attainable;
- *Historians* who keep a movement's memory and collect stories;
- *Resource mobilizers* who cut through institutional inertia;
- *Statespersons* who embody credibility and authority;
- *Communicators* who use symbols and metaphors to serve as public educators;
- *Outside sparkplugs* who raise the stakes and make the powerful squirm;
- *Inside negotiators* who use their knowledge of the system to apply pressure; and
- *Generalists* who bring multi-layers years of experience to any effort.

[Excerpted from *The Advocacy Institute*]

Communicators: Effective advocacy leaders are good *communicators*, both verbally and in writing. Although not every leader has to be strong in every area, it's important that your group have leaders who can *write effectively*, and who can *speak effectively* one-on-one, in small and large groups, to the media, and to decision-makers. All effective leaders must be *good listeners*, and aware of how their unspoken communication (their tone of voice, body language, mannerisms, etc.) affects the people around them.

Team Players: Effective advocacy leaders also help *develop team spirit and cohesiveness*. They *recognize the accomplishments of others and provide constructive criticism* when needed. They provide *encouragement and motivation*. They facilitate resolution of differences. They *seek to involve everyone*. They *delegate and build the leadership skills of others*. Effective advocacy leaders *accept responsibility for getting things done*. They take initiative, but they *also leave room and space for others to take initiative*. They offer help and information, and set a good example by seeking help and information when they need it. They make things happen, and they *stand aside to let positive things happen when others take action*. And they *keep their eye on the public policy prize!*

Problem-Solvers: Public policy advocacy is all about solving problems. So effective advocacy leaders use a *step-by-step approach to problem solving*. They help others:

- State the problem as simply and clearly as possible;
- Gather and organize all relevant information and available resources;
- List as many ideas or solutions they and their group can think of;
- Evaluate each idea or solution and choose the best one
- Design an implementation plan, with a timetable, assigned roles and resources; and
- Evaluate outcomes and readjust as necessary.

Self-Aware: Effective leaders know themselves (who am I? What am I doing here? What are my goals, purposes, expectations, motivations, and how do they fit into the group? What strengths or challenges do I bring? How can I use and improve my leadership capacity?) They know their own strengths and limitations, and make space for other leaders with advocacy and organizational skills and expertise they lack.

Stages of Advocacy Leadership Development

Individual Advocacy: Effective advocacy organizations know how to move constituents from addressing their individual needs to fighting for a larger vision. Many constituents come to our organizations initially seeking to improve their capacity for *individual advocacy*. They are looking for special knowledge about their rights and the processes that are available to secure those rights.

Peer Advocacy: As they begin to experience success in their self-advocacy, some see the plight of those “in the same boat” and want to provide *peer advocacy*. In addition to the knowledge and skills of individual advocates, peer advocates also need to have strong listening skills and empathy. They need to develop the capacity to provide support to others. They need to learn how to avoid substituting their judgment for the judgment of their peers who they are trying to help. And they need to learn how to collaborate with others – their peers, the individuals and agencies that might be able to provide help and support, and the institutions with which they are advocating.



Public Policy Advocacy: The next key stage of leadership development is *public policy advocacy*. Many constituents never reach this level of advocacy because they are consumed with the struggles of their daily lives – putting food on the table, working, taking care of their children, dealing with the obstacles placed in their way by often-brutal institutions. But there are many people with whom you work who will want to participate in public policy advocacy. They will need your support to learn:

- How service systems work, and their interrelated nature;
- The key decision-makers in the legislative, regulatory, and administrative arenas;
- Formal and informal decision-making processes: How is a law written, introduced, and passed? What is the role of lobbyists?;
- A clear knowledge of the facts about the issue(s), including barriers to change and solutions. They must understand more than how the current policies affect them;
- The qualities and components of effective systems, institutions, and services;
- The state and community resources that are available to assist families and children.

They also need support to develop effective advocacy skills, including:

- Critical reading and thinking;
- Effective advocacy writing;
- How and when to compromise (i.e., when compromise moves the issue forward);
- Team-building, consensus-building, problem-solving, and conflict resolution;
- Networking;
- How to train others, make presentations and engage in public speaking aimed at a variety of audiences;
- How to conduct a meeting;
- How to participate effectively in strategic planning, advocacy research, and development of reports;
- How to maximize stakeholder participation in planning and decision-making;
- Outreach and organizing skills; and
- How to grow new leadership.

What kind of advocacy leader are you? What kind of leadership exists in your group or organization? Where are your leadership gaps? What are you doing to build new leadership, to bring in new ideas, fill leadership gaps, maintain momentum, and sustain your movement and organization?

Chapter 9. Implementing Advocacy Strategies

Advocacy can be aimed at the national, state, county, or local legislature; regulatory and administrative agencies; the courts; and the grassroots. Advocacy activities might include pressing for formal policy decisions by state agencies, lobbying for legislation, pressuring for regulations to interpret a law, filing formal complaints with government agencies, filing lawsuits, using investigative reports to dramatize problems, and mobilizing large numbers of people to rally, participate in a legislative day, march, call, or write decision-makers. Your organization needs to “make space” for people to be involved at all different levels, depending on their available time, expertise, and comfort level.

Which strategies you use will depend in part on the strength of your support. If you have a group of 50 committed members who will come with you, you probably don’t want to have a demonstration or a march through wide city streets. Your group will be overshadowed by the environment, and you will appear weak. However, a group of 50 people in a City Council chamber that seats 30 can leave a very powerful impression!

When you are thinking about how to influence public policy, it’s important to understand how public policy is set.

Passing a Law – The Legislative Branch

The first step is getting a law passed. The U.S. Congress, each state, and county and municipal bodies have their own specific legislative rules. The normal process starts with a legislator deciding to sponsor a bill, sometimes at the suggestion of a constituent, interest group, public official, or the Governor or President. The bill is then drafted and prepared in proper technical form. It’s important to influence this stage of the process, because the first draft of the bill usually sets the stage for legislative discussion. If you have been working with a legislator on an issue, and they have agreed to sponsor a bill, you may want to draft the bill yourself. Or you may ask the legislator to set up a meeting with the people who will be drafting the bill so you can share your ideas.

The bill is introduced in a house of the legislature; it may be referred to an appropriate committee for review. When scheduled by the chair, the committee considers the bill at a meeting open to the public. The committee may report the bill to the full legislative body as it is, with amendments, or by a substitute bill. If it’s not considered or “reported out,” the bill remains in committee. Because the committee chair often has a lot of power over what bills get considered, it’s important to meet with them about your position.

Most states have two legislative bodies, a State Senate and State House or Assembly. When a majority of the members of one legislative body approve the bill, it is sent to the other legislative body where it goes through the same process. If the second House amends the bill, it is returned to the first House for a vote on the changes. A bill receives final legislative approval when it passes both Houses in identical form.

In the U.S. Congress, when two bills that are not identical pass the Senate and the House of Representatives, a conference committee of appointed members of both houses works out a compromise bill, which is voted on by members of both houses.

Signing a Law – The Executive Branch

Once a law is passed by the legislative branch, it moves on to the executive (president, governor, county executive, mayor). The Governor may sign it, conditionally veto it (returning it for specific changes), or veto it absolutely. If vetoed, a bill may become law if the legislature overrides the veto by a super-majority vote of both houses.

Check out your state’s legislative website or talk to your legislator to find out exactly how a bill becomes a law in your state.

[Adapted from New Jersey Office of Legislative Services, How A Bill Becomes Law]

Regulations and Implementation – The Regulatory Branch

Once a law has been passed, it has to be interpreted and enforced by a government agency. For example, your state Department of Human Services may be responsible for implementing laws about child care for women transitioning from welfare to work. But the law, or statute, doesn’t always contain enough details. It is the result of a very political legislative process that requires vagueness to ensure passage. So it is left to the relevant “regulatory agency” to define in more detail what the law means and how it is going to be interpreted and enforced.

The legislation is sent to the head of the appropriate agency (for example, the Commissioner of Education). That person then sends it to the appropriate department or section. (Most agencies have more than one component). The head of that department or section then assigns a team or an individual to draft regulations to “flesh out” or define the legislation. This is another important opportunity to influence policy. You can draft and submit your own regulations, or you can ask the legislator who sponsored the legislation to request a meeting with the agency staff who will be drafting the regulations.

Most states have laws, sometimes called Administrative Procedure Acts, requiring an opportunity for public comment on draft regulations. By reading the Federal Register or your state register, you can keep track of when those public comment periods are. Many states require agencies to respond to suggestions or recommendations made by public commenters, including explaining why they did or did not accept the recommendation. It is important to read the agency responses to recommendations. They help you learn about the other organizations that are interested in this issue, and what they recommended. They also help you understand the agency’s approach.

Reaching Legislative, Executive, and Regulatory Policymakers

When you want to reach a policy maker, you should plan to

Call * Write * Visit

If policy makers are to represent your wishes in the policy process, they need to hear from you. This is true of the executive branch (the President, Governors, mayors, etc), national, state, and local legislatures, and regulatory agencies. When contacting policy makers, whether in person, by mail, fax, or e-mail, or by phone, keep these hints in mind:

- **Be brief and to the point, and stick to one subject.**
- **Identify yourself and how you (and people you know) will be affected by what's being proposed.**
- **Be clear about what you want.** Name the law that's being discussed or the rules that are about to be changed, and specifically what you want the policy-maker to do.
- **Be accurate,** about the problem, its impact, and possible solutions.
- **Be specific.** Mention provisions that you agree and disagree with, and if possible, offer some alternatives or solutions.
- **Be polite and positive.**
- **Offer your assistance.** Let them know how you can be reached for further information, clarification or help.
- **Follow up.** After expressing your views, follow up on the policy maker's vote or action. Always send a thank-you note if their vote or action was in your favor – even if the overall vote didn't go your way. A polite note expressing your disappointment if the policy maker acted against your position is also important. Your appreciation or disappointment can also be expressed in more public ways, such as writing letters to the editor of your paper or putting an article in your newsletter. *[Adapted from Association for Children of New Jersey]*

Reaching the Grassroots

In addition to reaching policy makers directly, you need to keep in mind the general public. If enough of them are aroused, they will help make your case and your job will be easier. The same basic tools apply.

Write: With a few minor changes, the letter you send to a legislator can also be sent as a letter to the editor. That way your message may reach many other people.

Call: The same message you leave on your Congressperson's message machine or with their legislative aide can be called in to a radio call-in show. That's another way your message can reach a wider audience.

Visit: Or you can take the "little speech" you memorized to speak to the county commissioner the other day and repeat it at your church group, PTA, neighborhood organizations, etc. That's one more way your message can get wider exposure.

Advocacy Actions

When deciding what kind of action you are going to take, remember that legislators know how much time it takes to make a phone call, write an e-mail or letter, send a fax, and make a visit. **The more time you spend on your legislative advocacy, the more it means to the legislator.** A personal visit is worth a dozen letters; a letter is worth more than a phone call. That doesn't mean that phone calls and e-mails aren't important, just that they need to be combined with other advocacy efforts to have maximum effectiveness.

Phone Calls, E-mail, and Faxes to Elected Officials

Phone calls, e-mails, and faxes can be effective, especially when timing is critical and a policy maker's support or vote is needed immediately. Keep the following tips in mind.

- When phoning, ask to speak directly to the legislator or to their aide who handles that issue. You want to speak with someone who is knowledgeable about the issue, rather than the receptionist.
- When e-mailing or faxing, address the lawmaker and copy their aide.
- Explain you are from the lawmaker's district – or that you are from a group that has members in their district.
- If there is already a bill, give the bill number and name.
- Explain why the issue is important to you, your group, and your constituents.
- Ask the legislator to vote in your favor on a pending bill.
- If you are going to call on the phone, jot down your speaking points in advance. That helps you when you get nervous!
- If you are talking on the phone, write down notes on what is said during the conversation. Then you can write a follow-up letter summarizing what happened.

A telephone tree increases the number of contacts with policy makers. (And you want to get lots of contacts – you want the policy maker's folder on your issue to be bulging with phone messages and letters on your side of the issue!). This system allows a few lead callers to generate responses from a large number of constituents or coalition groups. In a telephone tree system, lead callers have a list of members who have agreed to make a call to their legislator(s). It's important to have reliable lead callers and accurate, brief information to pass along. (See *Your Action Alert Network*, page 18).

Letters and Postcards

Letters and postcards alert policy makers to your views. They also help educate your members and constituents and involve them in advocacy. A letter has an advantage over a phone call because the legislative office will keep a hard copy of the letter, so that your arguments can be read and reviewed. Also, a letter will generally evoke a response from the legislator or administrator, forcing them to give some thought to the issue and perhaps to go on the record in response.

Often people don't feel they have the time to write letters on their own, or they may feel that they aren't good writers, which leads some groups to use form letters. A

Gallup Poll found that over 70% of all lawmakers said they pay a great deal of attention to personally written letters, while only about 20% pay great attention to form letters. (Legislators know how easy it is to just sign your name to somebody else's letter!) There are ways you can generate lots of letters from members without having form letters. You can develop some "writing points," a point-by-point summary of key issues that can easily be used by members and constituents to draft their own letters. You can also develop 5-10 sample letters or postcards that people can either write in their own handwriting or adapt. Make sure you give people ideas about where they can personalize the letter. (See *Appendix D for sample postcard messages*).

When writing letters to policy makers, try to make them as personal as possible, based on your own experience and/or the stories of your constituents. Think about what you can say about yourself that might represent the legislator's constituency. Are you a voter? A person of color? A member of the representative's political party? A parent? A taxpayer? A person directly impacted by the policy? In a particular age group? Just a few letters can embody an entire legislative district's demographics.

Make sure you refer to any legislation or regulation by its correct number and title. State your position both in the first and last sentence of your letter, and address your letter correctly. Type or write legibly. Be brief and respectful. Try to fit your message on one page (sometimes they don't turn the page over!) A well-written one-page letter can have a greater impact than a lengthy three or four pages, so don't include volumes of extra materials or put down every argument you can think of. Stick to one or two key points, and express those points well. Send your letter in a timely fashion, and follow it up with a phone call. (See *Appendix E for sample letter*).

Effective Writing for Public Policy Advocacy

Types of Advocacy Writing

There are many ways in which writing is used for public policy advocacy. Some common types of advocacy writing include:

- An Op-Ed piece (opinion piece on a newspaper's editorial page)
- A press advisory or press release
- A letter to the editor
- A letter to a legislator, administrator, or other policy-maker
- A letter of complaint, or requesting an investigation by an oversight agency
- Public testimony before a legislative or regulatory hearing
- An investigative report (facts, analysis, conclusions, recommendations)
- Letters to inform, mobilize and organize your constituency, allies, and the general public
- A notice of a meeting, training, forum, or action.

Purpose of Advocacy Writing

Advocacy writing often shares facts and tries to guide the reader to a clear understanding of the subject, but advocacy writing has one main purpose: to persuade, to convince your readers to think the way you do about a subject, or act the way you want them to. Thus, effective advocacy writing contains facts that effectively support the writer's opinion, and presents them in a way that convinces their readers.

The key to successful writing skills for public policy advocacy is to be clear about what you want to say and about how it will be received. Your choice of words, the length of sentences, the tone of language you use, all reflect the relationship you want to create with your reader or audience. Often reading out loud what you have written can help capture the tone that you want.

The Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of Advocacy Writing

- **Who** is the audience? **Who** is the writing intended to affect?
- **What** is the issue? **What** message or information are you trying to convey?
- **When** are your opportunities for conveying the message?
- **Where** are your opportunities for conveying the message?
- **Why** are you writing? **What** is your purpose?
- **How** can you most effectively convey your message?

Ten Tips for Effective Advocacy Writing

- Keep it short and simple!
- Punctuation, spelling, and organization are important; jargon is deadly.
- Know the intended recipients of your message.
- Have a clear goal; know why you are writing.
- Understand the environmental context.
- Be sure you know what you are trying to convey.
- Catch them in the beginning. If you don't, they may never get to the middle or end.
- Summarize/introduce, then explain, then summarize/conclude.
- Remember that communication is a process designed to convey messages, information, viewpoints and perspectives, insights, and persuasive reasons.
- Always have someone read your work and give you their thoughts and suggestions.

Editing and proofreading help you check your writing to make sure that you have tied up any loose ends and clarified all your important points. Reread your final draft aloud to test it for sense and sound. Replace any words, phrases or sentences that are awkward or confusing. Use a dictionary and thesaurus to check for errors in usage, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Ask a reliable friend or colleague to check your writing for clarity, persuasiveness, or errors you may have missed. Prepare a final copy of your writing, and then proofread the final draft before submitting or sending it.

Testifying Before Policy Makers

Public testimony can be before a legislative body, an administrative agency, or at a public forum. It can be about a proposed bill, proposed regulations, or a topic of great public interest on which policy makers want to collect information and ideas. It is always important to have constituents with personal experiences or expertise testify at public hearings. For example, someone who depends on Medicaid for dental care is best able to discuss what effect cutting this type of care from Medicaid coverage could have on her/his life. Public testimony gives you and your constituents the chance to make a statement in front of an entire committee of legislators or administrative agency officials all at once – often shortly before the decision will be made.

Information about public hearings will be found in the Federal or State Register. The Registers will also contain information about who to contact to request a chance to speak. Request in writing to testify, by the deadline given in the Register, explaining why you want to speak and the perspective you can bring. Provide written testimony for filing with the group (ask in advance how many copies you should bring). You can expect to be limited in the amount of time you and each other constituent will be allowed to speak – usually no more than five minutes. Find out in advance exactly how much time you will be allotted, then plan to speak for a slightly shorter length of time. A half-page single-spaced will equal about one minute of oral testimony.

Oral testimony should be brief and have a central purpose and clear talking points. Your written testimony can be longer. Identify yourself, name your legislative district (if relevant), identify your group, state your position, your reasoning, and how you want the policy makers to respond. Use committee members' titles, i.e., Mr. Chairman, Senator, etc. Avoid writing complex sentences, and don't try to address too many issues!. Be short and concise. You may be given less time to present your testimony than originally planned, so make your main points at the beginning of the testimony.

Content: Speak from personal experience whenever possible – your own, or that of your constituents. Speak on policy issues as they apply to your life, or their lives. Know your audience and speak about things that are important to them. While emotion-filled testimony can be effective, it should be neither planned nor contrived. If speaking as an individual, don't substitute describing your group for something more personal. Talk about yourself, your friend or family member, your constituent. Be honest and natural. Use your own words, voice, and style. While someone else can help you to organize and type your testimony, sincerity and truthfulness are extremely important. Be substantive. Describe how the current policy is harmful, or prevents good things from happening. Give examples of barriers that you know are responsible for the problem. But don't make negative remarks about people who are testifying against your side of the issue – you don't want to make the policy makers sympathetic to them! Avoid rambling or repeating yourself, and try to use sound bites that can be picked up by the media.

When you are preparing your testimony, type one single-spaced copy for the committee record and make as many copies as needed for the entire committee or panel. Make additional copies to distribute to the media and to other participants who are interested in your comments. Make another copy for yourself to read, annotated (with stress marks or emphasis), double-spaced and in larger type so you can read it more easily.

Delivery: Practice your testimony in front of a group of people (or at least a mirror!). Practice, practice, practice! Remember that *proper preparation and practice prevents piss-poor performance!* If possible, watch yourself delivering your testimony in video tape, or in front of a mirror. Rehearse possible questions with someone, because the committee might actually ask you a question. Don't simply think through possible questions and answers. You'll find it much easier to respond to policy makers' questions if you have practiced it earlier. Study how the pros (anchor-people, for example) deliver written information. Pay special attention to eye-contact and hand movements. Think about using visual aids (charts, pictures, etc.) if that would be helpful.

Dress appropriately for the forum. If the hearing will be televised, avoid wearing clothes that will distract the viewer from your message (like stripes or complicated patterns).

Arrive before your scheduled time to speak, so that you can meet with other people who are testifying on your side of the issue and familiarize yourself with the surroundings. If possible, come at the beginning of the hearing and stay through the end. You can always gain valuable information about how the other side is presenting the issue – and who is on the other side! If you are told that you have less time to speak than you originally planned, or your testimony is taking longer than you expected, be prepared not to be able to finish reading your entire testimony. Remember that your written testimony will become part of the hearing record, even if you can't read all of it at the hearing.

While testifying, try to relax. Speak slowly and clearly; don't rush to get in a few more words that nobody will understand because you are speaking too fast! Read with meaning and emotion. Look up from your written material as much as possible, and make eye contact. If you've said everything you wanted to cover, don't keep talking to fill the time– and never speak beyond the allotted time. Don't disparage legislators, administrators, or testifiers who disagree with you – before, during, or after presenting testimony (at least until you are back with your group!) Thank the policy makers for listening to your ideas and for providing this forum for public comment and discussion.

Meeting with Elected Officials

Most people, including many activists, have never met with a legislator. It can be very intimidating. But if you don't share your ideas with legislators, you lose a powerful opportunity to persuade them to adopt those ideas. Speaking up won't guarantee that you will win, but not speaking up guarantees that your wishes won't be known

One critical step is to know your legislators and let them get to know you. Find out their committee assignments. Know their background. Know their positions and voting records. Get on their mailing lists. Find out if they have websites. Get acquainted with their staff and visit them in their district office. Know who handles specific issues. Communicate regularly. Begin the lobbying process early, before any bill appears on that issue. If your issue is already in a bill, know the bill name and number.

Practical Tips to Prepare for a Visit with Elected Officials

1. Decide who you are going to visit. In addition to your own legislator, you may want to speak with the Chair and/or other members of the committee that has oversight responsibilities for your issue(s). Or you may need to speak with the leader of the legislative body, if they have power in determining what issues come up for a vote. You may want to meet with the governor or mayor.

Sometimes when you call up for an appointment, the legislator is not available. (It's rare that you will get to meet with the Governor!) You then want to meet with the appropriate aide. If your target issue is improving job training opportunities, you will ask to meet with the aide who handles those issues. Don't be disappointed if you "only" get to meet with the aide. Legislators and executives rely very heavily on their aides, who often do the real work of reviewing bills and drafting positions. Meeting with aides and developing relationships with them is just as important as meeting with the legislators.

2. Establish your agenda and goals. What do you want to talk about? Are you going to support or oppose legislation that has already been introduced, or are you asking the legislator to introduce new legislation? What are your reasons for your position? Are you trying to get the legislator to vote a particular way, or to persuade his/her fellow legislators to vote that way, too? Are you trying to find out the legislator's views, or what the chances of passage are for a particular bill? You also need to find out how this legislator has voted on this issue in the past. Are they likely to be supportive of your position? Are they personally affected (for example, did they grow up on welfare)? This information will help you decide exactly what you want to say and what you think you will be able to accomplish. Allow time for small talk at the beginning, but not too much.

3. Plan your visit. When are you going to visit? Are you going to visit the legislator in the state capital, when the legislature is in session? Or would you prefer to visit the legislator when they are in their home office in their district? Is there a particular time that you need to visit, for example, before the bill will be voted on in committee?

4. Determine the group composition. It helps to go along with someone more experienced the first few times. It won't seem so intimidating, and having someone else doing the talking helps a lot. Much of learning involves watching (and imitating) others. Advocacy is no different.

There are several important things to keep in mind when deciding who is going to visit the legislator with you. Legislators are more likely to meet with your group if it

includes at least one person who lives in their district – one of their immediate constituents. It can also be helpful to include someone who has met the legislator before. You don't want a group that is too big – 4 or 5 people is the maximum number for an effective meeting – but you do want a group that is representative of your issue. You should also try to include someone who might not be seen as a natural ally. For example, it can be very helpful to bring a supportive senior citizen to a meeting where you are asking for more funding for after-school programs. A senior citizen isn't perceived as having a "vested interest" in programs for children, so their support can be very powerful. You can also use your group composition to combat stereotypes based on race and class. For example, the majority of people receiving welfare benefits are white, but welfare is often perceived as a "minority problem." Also, in the public policy debate about welfare, the voices of people receiving welfare are seldom heard. So you may want to bring a diverse group of welfare recipients to the meeting to smash both these stereotypes.

5. Listen well. A visit to a legislator can be very informative. The legislator's response to your issue and the points you are making can tell you about more effective approaches, the positions that your "enemies" are taking and what you need to do to combat them, where you do and don't have support, and what your chances are. Remember that legislators are people. They don't like to be lectured at, talked over, interrupted, or iced out of the conversation. If you listen well to them, they are more likely to listen well to you.

6. Be prepared, but don't feel that everyone needs to be an expert. When you meet with a legislator, you want to have a good understanding of your issue. But you don't have to present a doctoral dissertation on the subject! Remember that most elected officials are "generalists." They probably don't know all the ins and outs of the issue. Don't be afraid of being asked something you can't answer. And if you *are* asked something you can't answer? Simple. Do as the politicians do: say you don't know, but you'll find out and get back to them. Don't try to bluff or fake it. "That's a very good question, Senator. We hadn't considered that issue before, but we will. And we'll get back to you very soon with our thoughts." Then make sure you do!

It's a good idea to be able to talk about the issue in "expert" terms (statistics, for example) as well as "authentic" terms (actual impact on real people, individual stories, etc.) If the issue is complicated, you may want to divide up the various parts among the people who will be on the visit. You may introduce the topic and give an overview of why it's important to your group. Someone else may give a few key statistics and the results of any studies that have been done. Another person in your group may tell their real-life story. Someone else may give a few other examples of how people in your group have been affected. Another group member may ask the legislator for a commitment to vote a certain way, or to introduce legislation. Be open to counter-arguments, but don't get stuck on them. Don't be argumentative or confrontational. Finally, you or someone else closes the meeting by thanking the legislator for meeting with you.

Be prepared to have less time than you think to talk to the legislator or their aide. Prepare for two meetings – the 20-minute one you think you are going to have, and the 10-minute one you may end up with. Prioritize what you want to say, so you can easily switch to the shorter version if needed. It's helpful to have a summary of your points in writing so you can hand it to them even if you don't get to talk about all of them in person. It's a good idea to practice or role-play before your visit, especially if you are a novice.

7. Don't get intimidated, frustrated, or blow your stack. Legislators are very busy people. You may have to wait past your scheduled meeting time to get into the legislator's office. They may receive an urgent phone call, or even a call to go to the floor for a vote, while you are in their office. They may say something that you find offensive. You need to be prepared to take all of these things in your stride. If the meeting starts late, go to your shorter agenda. If the meeting is interrupted and the legislator has to leave, ask if you can continue to meet with the aide. (The legislator is likely to have the relevant aide at the meeting already). If not, ask if you can reschedule the meeting in the very near future. The answer is likely to be yes. If the legislator starts spouting offensive statements, or speaking impolitely to anyone in your group, you should politely but firmly let them know how offensive they are being. "I know it's not your intention, Assemblyman, but that statement is hurtful to our group. Let me tell you why." You can use these challenges as opportunities to educate the legislator. Blowing your stack will just get you escorted out of the office, never to be invited back!

8. Be on time, and don't stay too long. Be respectful of all the demands on the legislator's time, and don't be late or overstay your welcome. If you are late, you may find that they have moved on to someone or something else. Also remember that legislators and executives have lots on their plate, and limited attention span on any one issue (unless it's a real hot topic at the moment). Give them your key points, demonstrate your commitment and the strength of your movement, get an idea of their position and reasoning, and let them know that you are not going away. Once that has been accomplished, you've achieved your goals.

9. Remember you are there to build a relationship. It's very seldom that you will meet a legislator or executive who agrees with you - or disagrees with you – on every issue. There are no permanent friends or permanent enemies in public policy advocacy. The same person who voted for welfare "reform" may also be a strong supporter of quality job training, child care, and transportation to help people transitioning from welfare to actually be able to get and keep good jobs. No visit is a one-shot deal; each visit is just one of many. Try to get closure on your issue. If you hear what you had hoped for, express your thanks and leave. If you reach an impasse, thank her/him, even if disappointed, and say so. Leave room to continue the discussion at another time. You may find that the more information and ideas you bring to the legislator, the more receptive s/he is. The more they get to know you and your group, the more they will come to understand your issues and respect your commitment. Then they will naturally reach out to you when those issues are being discussed and they are trying to develop

their positions. The more you get to know individual legislators, the better equipped you will be to persuade them.

10. Follow-up is important. Send a brief thank-you note to the legislator, their aide, whoever met with you. Forward any information you promised, or other information that is relevant to your discussion. If commitments were made in the meeting, repeat your understanding of them. Invite them to come speak to your group. Let them know about your activities, forums, trainings, conferences, studies, etc. Keep them informed. Even if they don't read the information right away, it will get put in their folder on that issue, and when they have to consider their position, it will be there to influence them. Keep track of their actions, too. Let them know if they disappoint you by the way they vote. But also let them know you appreciate them when they vote in favor of your position! Remember that they will be hearing from people on the other side of the issue, too! *[Adapted from Common Cause, 1989]*

Lobbying Rules for Non-Profit Organizations

If you are a tax-exempt, non-profit organization, members, constituents, and supporters can deduct their contributions to your organization. But to maintain your "charitable" status, your group may NOT endorse or campaign for or against candidates for federal, state, or local public office. (You may disseminate an issues questionnaire to all candidates for that office, and publicize the results.) *(See Appendix F for sample).*

Federal tax laws *do* allow non-profits to engage in legislative lobbying consistent with their mission and by-laws, and to educate the general public and policy makers about your positions. (Advocating the adoption or rejection of regulations is not lobbying). Your group is attempting to influence legislation ("lobbying") if you either:

- Contact or urge the public to contact members of a legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing specific legislation; or
- Advocate the adoption or rejection of specific legislation.

But there are limits on how much money you can spend on legislative efforts. If you wish to lobby, your non-profit group must choose one of the following:

- You must not spend "a substantial" amount of money on lobbying; or
- You make an IRS election to spend no more than 20% of your funds on lobbying.

Most foundations and all government agencies prohibit the use of their funds for lobbying. So the amount of money you can spend on lobbying is limited both by IRS regulations and by the amount of unrestricted money you can raise (for example, through membership dues, sale of materials, private donors who do not deduct their contributions from their taxes, etc.) A helpful resource to understand the limits on lobbying is the Alliance for Justice *(see Appendix A)*.

Regulatory Advocacy

1. Determine the agency or agencies with "jurisdiction" – the agency or agencies that have the responsibility to develop regulations and implement and enforce the law. Sometimes the law itself will tell you the responsible agency. The announcement of draft

regulations in the Federal or State Register will tell you where to send your comments and the responsible agency.

2. Identify the “point person” or “point people” within the agency who are responsible for writing or revising, interpreting, and enforcing regulations. You want to develop an ongoing relationship with the people within the agency who are responsible for writing or revising regulations, interpreting regulations when there are questions, and enforcing the regulations. You want them to know who you are, your position on issues, and the power you bring to an issue. You want to know who to call when you want to influence regulations. You want to know who can interpret the regulations in a favorable way, and who has the power to enforce regulations when they are ignored.

3. Develop relationships with government officials and agency staff. It is important to determine which government agency (Department of Health, Department of Human Services, etc.) will be responsible for establishing regulations to implement the law or program. Meet with staff members of that agency and also the governor’s office. Maintain friendly contact and be as helpful to government officials as possible. Often they can use your information and advice on technical matters – give it to them willingly! Try to identify at least one key contact person in each agency that can assist you. Talk with them about problems that concern you and that are having an adverse effect on your constituents. Also talk to them about what is working well. Invite representatives from those agencies to meetings, conferences, and special events. Educate them about your work. Provide them with brochures, fact sheets, newsletters.

4. Know the relevant laws and procedures governing regulations. Check out both the federal and state administrative codes. They will tell you when administrative regulations are required, when they are prohibited, who has the authority to promulgate an administrative regulation, and the process the agency must go through (public notices, hearings, etc.) to promulgate an administrative regulation.

5. Monitor the media, State and Federal Registers. Watch for actions by government agencies that affect your organization, constituents, or community. Designate someone to regularly read sections of the Federal and New Jersey Registers that are likely to affect you. Look for announcements in major newspapers.

6. Develop a plan of action for regulatory advocacy. Include:

- Comments (positive and negative) on each component of the draft regulations, specific recommendations for improvement, and justification for those recommended changes;
- Individual and organizational responsibilities;
- An assessment of potential opposition to your proposals;
- A plan to deal with opposition; and
- The compromises you can live with.

7. Develop relationships and coalitions with interested organizations. Whenever possible, work with other groups to spread your message and also share the work. Try to build consensus among professional groups and among consumers/ constituents and grassroots organizations. Include usual and unlikely allies in your coalition.

8. Get broad endorsement on your comments on proposed regulations. Discuss the proposed regulations or problems with existing regulations with a broad cross-section of impacted parties before developing your comments on regulations. Distribute a draft of your comments to targeted groups and individuals to get their suggestions and or endorsement. Request letters endorsing your comments. Encourage other organizations and affected individuals to develop their own comments. Include the reasoning behind your recommendations in your comments.

9. Use legislative oversight to impact regulations. When the government agency in the executive branch is intransigent, and needs some extra motivation to change, you can request that state legislators conduct an oversight hearing. Remember to have an outcome in mind for these hearings, before you begin. Work with legislative staff to put the hearing together, identify witnesses, and develop their questions for witnesses. Organize targeted groups and impacted individuals to testify at these hearings.

10. Mobilize grassroots support. Develop a response network that is easy and effective to use. Provide network participants with sample letters with clear concise messages that are easily conveyed and understood by participants and regulators. Use technology to your advantage (web sites, e-mail alerts, list serves, etc.). Numbers are important!

Adapted from Regulatory Advocacy at the State and Federal Level, ASHA's Ad Hoc Committee on Member Education on Advocacy (1996)

Spreading the Word: Grassroots and Media Advocacy

Everyone gets their information through the media – you, other members of your organization, funders, your constituency, policy makers, and opinion leaders. **Media advocacy** is the strategic use of mass and community media to advance a social or public policy initiative. You use the media to communicate with your own constituency and supporters (through your organization’s newsletter); potential supporters (other organizational newsletters); and the general public (community and other newspapers, radio, Television). You use the media to forward your **grassroots advocacy** efforts. Getting your story in the papers or on radio or television can move people to support your case and perhaps even to take positive action. For more detailed information on Savvy Media Advocacy, see the companion guide to this book.

Spreading the Word and the Work: Coalition Advocacy

There are many organizations working hard on important social justice issues in the United States. Reaching out and forming alliances with other groups and individuals combines the power of these organizations to work towards a common goal. Coalitions offer resources; forums for thinking about problems; reduced competition for funding and time from supporters; and a more efficient way to work with community agencies and elected officials. Coalitions bring strength in numbers, diversity (different bases of public and political support), and broadened skills and expertise.

Since there are so many benefits to working in coalitions, why aren’t they more common – and effective? Coalition work requires important skills. All the members of the coalition must be very clear about the coalition’s goals, and how those goals fit in with their priorities. Decision-making processes must be clear and work for all members. There must be a detailed communications plan that address who speaks for the coalition, and how communication is handled between the coalition and outside groups, legislators, and individuals. Each individual or group must contribute something toward the coalition, and the other coalition members must respect what they are offering. The coalition has to agree on methods to ensure participatory credit for each person and group. Coalition members have to agree on acceptable behaviors within and outside the coalition. And the coalition has to agree on when, who and what to negotiate and compromise.

Tips for Coalition Advocacy

When you are considering joining or starting a coalition, consider the following questions.

1. *Will the coalition be temporary or permanent?*
2. *What issues do people and/or groups agree upon?*
3. *What are the differences within the coalition or among potential coalition members?*
4. *What does each member have to offer?*
5. *What do people or organizations give up and gain in joining the coalition?*
6. *What conflicts and compromises can we anticipate? How will we address them?*

Rallies, Demonstrations, and Marches

Rallies, demonstrations, and marches can be effective public policy advocacy tools, when combined with other strategies. These tactics can show massive support for, or opposition to, proposals around urgent issues. They provide an excellent opportunity for numerous individuals, groups and organizations to band together and show solidarity. Almost all rallies and demonstrations are sponsored and supported by a variety of organizations. The power of such large displays of strength and unity can be tremendous. They force elected officials and policy makers to recognize the strength of our numbers and the level of our commitment around an issue. They also help to bring these issues to the forefront of the public's thinking. They make headlines and receive a great deal of media attention, often forcing politicians to re-think their positions.

For example, combine your rally, demonstration, or march with a press conference, or conduct your rally at the same time that a public hearing is taking place. Make an appointment to meet with your legislator after the rally is over. Deliver the thousands of letters, petitions, or stories you've collected to the policy-maker as part of a march. *Be creative!*



Chapter 10. Are You Ready for Public Policy Advocacy?

Leadership: Effective advocacy organizations have strong leadership and direction. The staff and members are intensely dedicated to improving policies, practices and outcomes for substantial numbers of people. They set clear definitions of responsibilities, ensure accurate communication, and have clear decision-making. Sufficient attention is paid to

securing enough money so that funding problems don't force the group to curtail work in the middle of a campaign. *Does this describe your organization?*

Improvement Strategy: Effective advocacy organizations constantly plan, implement, evaluate, and change their advocacy based on what they learn. They persistently focus on key systems and issues that affect the lives of their constituents. They develop an increasingly precise understanding of specific changes that would address the problems they are concerned about, and they press for these changes. Because of their clear strategy, they bring about major policy changes in line with their goals. Once they win *policy* changes, they vigorously monitor their *implementation* to make sure that improvements actually take place. *How well does this describe your group's activities?*

Information: Effective advocacy groups carefully document the problems they are concerned about and appropriate solutions to those problems. They develop an accurate "map" of the systems that are involved, including their formal and informal aspects. *Have you done your research? Have you looked to see how other places have solved similar problems? Do you know how the institutions and systems work?*

Building support: Effective advocacy groups use their own media (newsletters, reports) and the mass media to communicate their views effectively to others. They also develop effective support networks (among members, sympathetic groups, and individuals, through participating in coalitions). They build a well-organized, committed constituency that is capable of mobilizing substantial political power. *What support networks have you developed? Is your constituency strong, committed, responsive and active?*

Intervention: Effective advocacy groups intervene at multiple levels of the system (legislature; state, county and local agencies) when pursuing their objectives. They use multiple intervention tactics (face-to-face negotiations, commenting on regulations, demonstrations, filing complaints with government agencies) in pursuing their objectives. They have a high degree of competence in the strategies they use. They view specific tactics as creating a bargaining advantage that they capitalize on through continuing direct pressure on and negotiations with decision-makers. And they persist in working on the same issue over a period of years. *How does your group score in these areas?*

Appendix A: Selected List of Reference Organizations on Advocacy Issues

Advocacy Institute
1629 K St. NW #200
Washington, D.C. 20006-1629
202-387-9177
www.advocacy.org

Alliance for Justice
2000 P Street NW Suite 712
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-822-6070
www.afj.org

Center for Community Change
1000 Wisconsin Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20007
202-342-0567
www.communitychange.org

Children's Defense Fund
25 E St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
202-628-8787
www.childrensdefense.org

Human SERVE
622 West 113 Street, Room 410
NY, NY 10025
202-387-9177

Independent Sector
1828 L Street NW Suite 1200
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-223-8100
www.indepsec.org

Nat'l. Comm. For Responsive Philanthropy
2001 S Street NW Suite 602
Washington, D.C. 20009
202-387-9177
www.primenet.com

Nat'l. Ass'n. of Child Advocates
1522 K St. Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20005-1202
202-289-0777
www.childadvocacy.org

Congressional Legislative Information
www.thomas.loc.gov

Selected List of Publications on Advocacy Issues

Public Policy Advocacy

Citizens' Handbook: A Guide to Building Community; www.vcn.ca/citizens-handbook

Community Tool Box: Building Capacity for Community and Systems Change;
<http://ctb.ukans.edu/tools/EN>

How and Why to Influence Public Policy: An Action Guide for Community Organizations
Center for Community Change (see Reference Organizations, previous page)

People Power: Service, Advocacy, Empowerment

Brian O'Connell c/o The Foundation Center; 212-620-4230; www.fdncenter.org

Lobbying

Being a Player-A Guide to the IRS Lobbying Regulations for Advocacy Charities
(see Reference Organizations, previous page)

Lobby? You? Yes, Your Nonprofit Organization Can! It Should!, Nonprofit Lobbying Guide: Advocating your Cause – And Getting Results, and Tax-Exempt Organizations' Lobbying and Political Activities Accountability Act of 1987: A Guide for Volunteers and Staff of Nonprofit Organizations (see Reference Organizations, previous page)

Voting and Political Campaigns

Handbook on Tax Rules for Voter Participation Work by Section 501(c)(3) Organizations, by Thomas A. Troyer et al of Caplan & Drysdale, Independent Sector (above)

Permissible Activities of 501(c)(3) Organizations During a Political Campaign, an Independent Sector Issue Brief, Independent Sector (see Reference Organizations, previous page))

Seizing the Initiative (on ballot initiatives and referenda), Alliance for Justice (see Reference Organizations, previous page)

Voter Registration Implementation Guide for NonProfits, How to Monitor Voter Registration in Public Assistance Agencies in your Community, and Contact Information for Election Officials in All 50 States (see Reference Organizations, previous page)

Appendix B: Welfare and Human Rights Monitoring Project Survey

This report is strictly confidential and will not affect your benefits.

Names and identifying information will be protected in all project reports.

Discrete Case ID _____ Interviewer _____ Date _____ Location _____

I. Personal Information

Name _____ Age _____ Gender _____ Race _____

Address _____
Telephone (_____) _____ Single parent? ____ # of children, ages _____
Citizenship status (optional) ____ Is child support/paternity identification a problem for you? Yes ____ No ____

2. Benefits You Receive Now. Please circle your answer.

TANF Food Stamps General Relief SSI Other _____
Since welfare "reform," have your benefits: stayed the same increased decreased

3. Are you working now? Yes ____ No ____ (If the answer is "No," skip to #4).

Type of work (Such as - receptionist, writer, construction worker) _____
Is your work: Part-time Full-time Permanent Temporary
Hourly wage: \$5.00 to \$7.00 \$7.00 to \$9.00 \$9.00 to \$11.00 \$11.00 to \$13.00
Other _____
Does your job include any of the following benefits? (Circle any that apply) ___ Health insurance
___ Dental ___ Vacation leave ___ Personal leave ___ Sick leave ___ Childcare

4. Have you ever felt violated or treated unfairly by your caseworker or the welfare office?

During your application for benefits?
In complying with the rules?
Did the welfare department tell you about exemptions from the rules?
Do you know how to appeal a welfare department decision?

5. Media Contacts

Would you be available to speak with the press? Yes ____ No ____
Do you wish your name to be kept confidential? Yes ____ No ____
How can someone contact you? _____

6. The welfare system has violated the following of my Universal Human Rights: (See attached) ___ Article 1 ___ Article 2 ___ Article 3 ___ Article 4 ___ Article 5

___ Article 7 ___ Article 12 ___ Article 22 ___ Article 23 ___ Article 25
(Please write your story on the back of this page.)

Thank you for your participation in this project. Only through the courage of people like you can we tell voters and lawmakers the true impact of "welfare deform."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

"Recognition of the inherent dignity of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world."

Preamble to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

___ **Article 1** "All human beings are born equal in dignity and rights."

___ **Article 2** "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

___ **Article 3** "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person."

___ **Article 4:** "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude [in any of their forms]."

___ **Article 5** “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment.”

___ **Article 7** “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law.”

___ **Article 12** “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honor and reputation.”

___ **Article 22** “Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realisation...of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.”

___ **Article 23** “(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protections against unemployment. (2) Everyone...has the right to equal pay for equal work. (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration insuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. (4) Everyone has the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”

___ **Article 25** “(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same special protection.”

Appendix C: JOIN SPAN's E-ADVOCACY NETWORK

Postage costs are up and “change” barely describes the dynamic political landscape of Trenton and Washington. So, SPAN must find an efficient and effective way to inform and activate your participation in the public policy process. As parents and advocates for improving the lives of our children, we must pay close attention to what will be an important year for public policy. SPAN anticipates that issues will be upon us fast and furious in this new millennium and the best way for us to keep in contact with you is through the new **SPAN E-Action Network**.

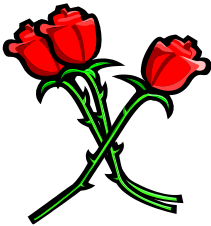
AT THE STATE LEVEL: Governor Chris Christie is planning on many major changes to current policies from education to health to child welfare. We have new Commissioners of Health and Children and Families, a new Director of Child Behavioral Health, Prevention and Community Partnerships, and DYFS, and many other new faces in the administration. Now, if all of that change has you breathless, don't relax yet -- we could have a whole new crew in the statehouse this time next year! *All* of our elected state representatives are up for election in November, and each of you will have to pay close attention to the candidates running in your district.

AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL: Implementation of the Affordable Care Act has significant promise to increase health coverage and quality health care, but it is still being

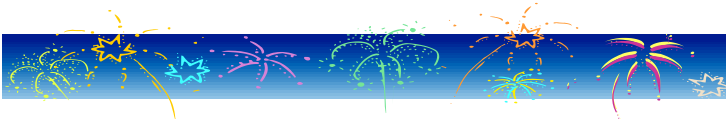
rolled out. The Administration is seeking to make sweeping changes in education. The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* will govern changes in the Title I program for students at-risk of academic failure, education for second language learners, teacher development, safe and drug free schools, and Parent Information Resource Centers. Within the next year, Congress will begin to take up issues around the reauthorization of *IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. It may seem like only yesterday that we were sending letters and photos to Washington, and it will take a similar effort this time around to insure the educational rights of ALL children.

SIGN ON AND JOIN THE NETWORK: SPAN wants to make sure that parents and advocates have up-to-the minute information on these and yet-to-surface issues. So, join our E-Action Alert Network by logging into our website at www.spanadvocacy.org and signing up! We also offer tips on contacting legislators and links to help you find your local representatives. If you prefer “snail mail”, please call Debra Jennings at 973-642-8100, ext. 106, and leave a message including your name, its spelling, your address, city/town, county and zip. Or you can also send a postcard via Pony Express ☺.

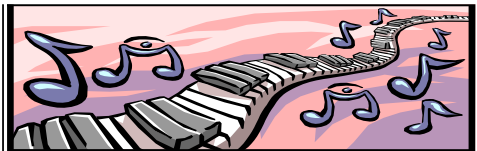
Appendix D: Sample Postcard Messages



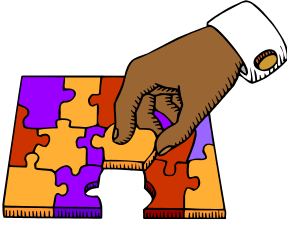
Every mom in New Jersey deserves a Happy Mother’s Day, but for some moms, their life is no bed of roses. Please, give a rose to moms transitioning from welfare to work. Support Family Care health coverage for low-income working parents!



This year, let’s celebrate Mother’s Day by giving moms transitioning from welfare to work something to celebrate – all the help they need to support their families, including an earned income tax credit.



Put a song in the hearts of New Jersey moms transitioning from welfare to work. Make sure they have the supports they need, like quality, accessible child care!



Every mom in New Jersey deserves a Happy Mother's Day. Please help our state's moms transition from welfare to work by making sure they have all the puzzle pieces they need – quality, affordable child care; good job training; decent jobs with benefits; health coverage for themselves and their children; safe and habitable housing; transportation; and an earned income tax credit.

[Postcards were printed up with one of the above pictures on each one. Then people wrote their individual messages, based on the above ideas. Thousands of postcards were sent around Mother's Day to state legislators from people around the state. The campaign contributed to the passage of legislation that expanded health coverage to working low-income parents, and provided an earned income tax credit.]

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE LETTER TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL

Dear Honorable Governor _____:

I am writing as a voter and the parent of a child struggling with mental illness. Unfortunately for my child, she is “not ill enough” to be eligible for intensive mental health services, and our family can’t afford expensive private programs, so she is on a waiting list. But every day I see her deteriorate. If we don’t get help soon, I worry she will get involved in crime and end up in juvenile justice. My child is falling through the cracks, and I don’t know where to turn. I keep getting referred to different agencies, none of whom can help us. Sometimes I feel that I am headed for a mental breakdown.

My hopes were raised a year ago when then-Governor Whitman announced the Children’s System of Care Initiative for children with mental health needs. She said that this Initiative would reduce barriers for families and would allow children to move between levels of care on an “as-needed” basis without disruption of services. It would establish a team approach to planning for each child with mental health needs. It would expand services, such as mobile crisis outreach and in-home counseling, as well as linkages between facility-based and community-based services to help children as they transition from facilities back into their communities and homes. And it would set up family support organizations in each county, staffed by parents of children with mental health needs, who could support families and share their own experiences and information. It sounded like just what my daughter and my family needed!

But now I have learned that there is a problem with the Initiative. I have seen letters from service providers, labor unions, and others who are opposing implementation of the Children’s System of Care. I have heard legislators talk about how much the Initiative will cost. And I have read an interview with you where you said you are delaying implementation of the Initiative until you can study it. But every day that you delay this Initiative is another day my daughter goes without help. It’s another day that my other children go without my attention because I spend so much of my energy trying to deal with my daughter. It’s another day that I wonder whether I will get that call from the police station that I am so afraid of.

Please, Governor _____, move forward now with the Children’s System of Care. *My daughter can’t wait.*

[Letters like these contributed to the then-Governor’s moving forward with the System of Care.]

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CANDIDATES

Dear [Candidate for Public Office]:

I am writing on behalf of the New Jersey Health Care Coalition, a network of individuals, congregations, and organizations concerned with the health and well-being of children and families in our state. We are seeking to ascertain your position on NJ

Family Care eligibility for parents of eligible children who earn less than 200% of the federal poverty level, including immigrant parents who have been in the US up to five years. This Administration has unilaterally cut parents with incomes between 133% and 200% of the FPL, and all immigrant families who have been in the US less than 5 years, off of NJ Family Care, a move that we know will also result in more children, including children who are citizens, being dropped from the rolls. If elected, would you vote to:

(1) **Reinstate parents up to 200% of FPL?** Yes No

If the governor vetoed this law, and veto override was unsuccessful, would you vote to:

(2) **Require the state to cover victims of domestic violence under NJ Family Care regardless of past income?** Yes No

(3) **Require the state to allow parents to “buy into” NJ Family Care parent coverage at a sliding fee scale?** (NJ already allows families to “buy into” NJ Family Care for their children when their income exceeds 300% of FPL.) Yes No

(4) **Remove the 5-year cap on benefits** if there are insufficient jobs paying living wages and child care is not available? Yes No

(5) **Guarantee a healthy start for every child through WIC** (Women, Infants and Children nutritional program)? (Poor nutrition in pregnancy and early childhood leads to devastating consequences for children and greater expenses for taxpayers later on.) Yes No

(6) **Reinstate NJ Family Care Coverage for documented immigrants who have been in the US less than 5 years?** (Documented immigrants pay income, property and sales taxes just like citizens.)

Yes No

Thank you for your honest responses to our questions. These questions and the answers of all responding candidates will be provided to members of our network throughout the state.