

Advocacy Strategies



Building A Community Plan

Advocacy: A Definition

Advocacy is problem solving used:

1. To protect rights or change unfair discriminatory or abusive treatment to fair, equal and humane treatment.
2. To improve services, gain eligibility for services or change the amount or quality of services to better meet the needs of an individual
3. To remove barriers which prevent access to full participation in community life

Remember: Your first task as an advocate is to become fully informed.





What is Advocacy?

Progress - change for the better - will not happen without advocacy. Advocacy is the tool citizens use in our democracy to bring about improvements. People with disabilities have seen major changes in laws, the service system, and public attitudes in recent years. Communities have begun to see that people with disabilities have a right to fully participate in all aspects of life. This awakening began, with great effort and behind-the-scenes preparation, because people with disabilities have decided for themselves it is time to use advocacy for change.

Why choose advocacy?

Advocates must be careful to not allow others to define who they are and what they want. The words “advocate” and “advocacy group” are seen by some as negative terms. Some think of an advocate as conveying a tone of “harshness”, “unreasonableness”, or “selfishness”. This perception of the term “advocate” reaches beyond disability-related advocacy - it includes the advocacy of special interest groups in Congress, lobbying, and other contexts.

The reputation of advocacy, and advocates, who work on behalf of the rights of people with disabilities will suffer or improve depending on our advocacy approach. This booklet is designed to give you some ideas for how you can be effective as an advocate.

Every advocate has a “style”. This style will develop over time, based upon experience and personality. It might be a part of your personality to avoid face-to-face conflicts, or to give in on a point just to avoid ill feelings. Despite this, based upon your experience, you may come up with techniques by which you can still be an effective advocate. You may find that you can say what you need in the form of a letter, and this is your preferred approach to advocacy.

There is no “ideal style”. There are styles which are more effective in particular circumstances. With experience, you will find the techniques which complement your personality, and help you define your style, and your role, as an advocate.



What is your
Advocacy Style?

I challenge others openly when they make inaccurate comments or say something inappropriate.

I prefer immediate responses to problems.

I work really hard to look at all sides of the problem before I offer input.

I value opinions that are different than my own.

I challenge others privately when they make inaccurate or inappropriate statements.

I really try to put myself in others' shoes.

I offer immediate feedback, even when I know others may not like what I have to say.

I make it very clear to others what is acceptable and not acceptable to me.

I believe there are two sides to every issue and try to look at them both.

When I see someone being taken advantage of, I am compelled to do something about it right away.

I'm more comfortable filing a complaint in writing.

I'm more comfortable filing a complaint in person.

I'm a pretty soft-hearted person.

I like to take the bull by the horns.

I prefer to discuss alternatives informally.

I'm very organized and would closely document advocacy proceedings.

Finding My Style

Based on experiences, we all have comfort zones and unique approaches to problem-solving.

With which statements do you identify most closely?

Remember, there is not a right or wrong approach to advocacy. Styles change and develop and acquire flexibility with experience.

On the next few pages are different problem scenarios that will help you further define your individual problem-solving style.



Scenario 1

You want to increase the availability of downtown parking. You have talked with several others who agree with you. You decide that your first step is to meet with a group known as the “Downtown Association”. The chairperson says that she is really interested in getting the business community involved. You have told the chairperson that several members of your group use wheelchairs, and she has assured you that the room has no barriers to mobility. You are scheduled to present your proposal at one of their meetings. As you enter the room, you notice that some of the faces look hostile. The podium has a step and there is no ramp. The chair introduces you, saying, “Today we have several handicaps and wheelchair people who want to talk to us about parking. We all want to help the less fortunate, so listen carefully...”

How do you react?

- A. Tell the chair that you need an accessible podium, and since there is no such podium you would like to reschedule. Then, leave the room.
- B. Go ahead with your presentation, but tell the group that you are disappointed with the lack of accessibility. Explain the chair’s use of language is demeaning.
- C. Go ahead with the presentation as if nothing is wrong, and privately tell the chair afterwards about the problems with accessibility and language.
- D. Another reaction?

How will your reaction help or hurt your cause?

Scenario 11

An illustration showing two stylized, grey, blocky figures standing on either side of a large, 3D puzzle piece. The puzzle piece is shaped like the letter 'M' and is being held up by the figures. The background is a simple grey gradient.

The local community mental health agency has a clubhouse, which has always been run by the staff. You think it should be run by the people who live there. A new director has just been hired, and she says she believes in consumer participation and consumer control, and wants to change things. This makes you very happy. You and some other members bring up the following concerns:

1. the clubhouse is dirty and run-down, with crummy hand-me-down furniture
2. some of the members bring alcohol into the clubhouse, and some arrive drunk
4. some of the members use foul and demeaning language

The director thanks you, but has to leave for a meeting. The next day she posts “rules”:

1. set up a cleaning schedule that says who is supposed to clean what, and when.
2. require each member to bring \$1 when they visit, to be used to buy new furnishings
3. anyone suspected of bringing alcohol on the premises or of being drunk is banned from the house until they can show they are receiving alcohol treatment
4. foul or demeaning language is banned, and cause for being banned from the house when a staff person witnesses its use

You are shocked, as you thought the director would call a meeting to discuss the concerns and work out a solution. You ask the director what happened, and what about consumer participation?” The director says, “These concerns were too serious to put off. We need change now. “ **What do you do?**

- A. Call the Mental Health Ombuds, read off the rules. Request help to file a grievance alleging violation of consumer rights, including the right to be treated with respect and dignity.
- B. Run into the director and after a little small-talk bring up the rules. Ask for a meeting.
- C. Write the director a letter stating that the process was wrong and that the rules are too harsh. Encourage staff to sign the letter also.
- D. You know a newspaper reporter, and you tell him that persons in the mental health system are not treated with respect, citing the clubhouse as an example.

Scenario



You are a librarian and use a wheelchair. The entire library is now wheelchair accessible thanks to your efforts. You are very content with your job and the people you work with. You and your spouse purchased a new home, and discover the nearby bus route you need to continue working is not wheelchair accessible. You have gone to the transportation authority, and when you tell the Director of Services you need transportation to work, she responds, "Oh you work? That's wonderful!" She goes on to say that there simply isn't funding but thanks you for your interest on behalf of people "confined to wheelchairs." Wishing you the best in finding a job closer to home, she apologizes that she is late for another meeting and leaves you in her office. You know your best friend, who also has a disability, has gotten nowhere in trying to get an accessible bus route to serve her area. **How do you react?**

- A. Immediately call the Office of Civil Rights and file a complaint alleging that your right to access to transportation under the Americans with Disabilities Act has been violated. Encourage all your friends with disabilities to do the same.
- B. Write the Director a letter formally requesting accessible service. Ask that a policy be established for processing requests for accessible bus service. Send a copy to the Board. Ignore the demeaning behavior of the Director. Focus on the issue of accessible service.
- C. Write a letter to the Board of the transportation department complaining of the insulting manner in which you were treated, and asserting you and your friends intend to use the law to obtain the service you have a right to.
- D. Scratch the Director off your list of helpful public servants. Ask a friend in the transportation department and ask how you the current routes could be adjusted to meet your needs. Let other friends who have disabilities know who they should contact if they need a route adjustment.
- E. Another reaction? **How will your reaction help/hurt your cause?**

Scenario



You have a brother with a developmental disability who receives Medicaid, and are having trouble finding a dentist for him. The nearest dentist who accepts Medicaid is three hours away. Your dentist says that Medicaid doesn't pay enough, and besides there is too much paperwork. Your brother needs extensive dental work and you would have to miss a great deal of work to get him to and from his appointments. You have tried calling most of the dentists in the area, to see if one would make an exception, and have gotten nowhere. You call your DDD case manager, and she tells you that this is a typical problem. Most folks are driving to Seattle, where there are several dentists who can help out. You figure something has got to change. **How do you react?**

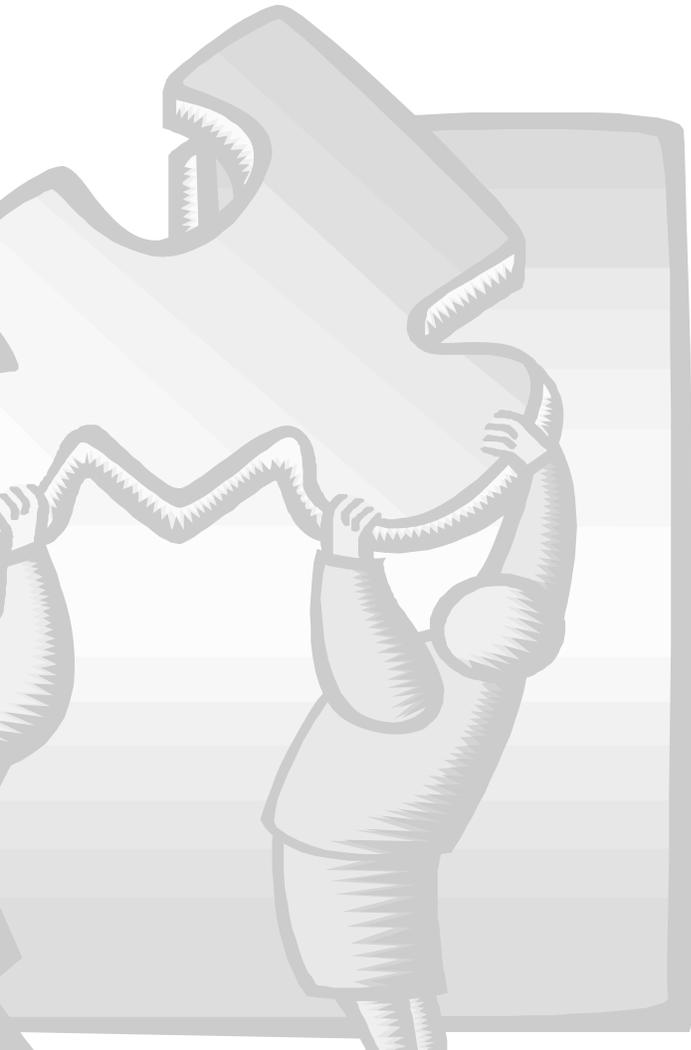
A. With a half dozen friends who have the same problem, you make an appointment at the local DDD office and demand that they develop a response.

B. Schedule a meeting with the local chapter of the American Dental Association. Explain the problem and ask for their help. You plan to see if you can get as many of the dentists as possible to take one or two patients. That way none of them get stuck with all of the low-paying Medicaid cases.

C. Tell your reporter friend about the problem. She is planning a series on how medical professionals fail to meet the needs of low-income people, and you're pretty confident this would fit right in.

D. Another reaction? **How will your reaction help or hurt your cause?**

Types of Advocacy



There are a variety of activities which fall within general **Self-advocacy** techniques, which allow individuals to bring about resolution of their own concerns. Self-advocates gather advice and information and take action to resolve a particular issue. Self-advocacy skill training, publications, and information and referral lines commonly support self-advocacy.

When self advocates feel their efforts aren't enough to resolve an issue, **mediation** techniques may bring both parties to a settlement which works. Ideally, both parties emerge from mediation with an agreement and a working relationship.

In some cases, an individual can obtain a satisfactory resolution by using an agency **complaint and grievance process**. Particularly where a public service is involved, there is usually a grievance process which can be used.

There is no "best way" to solve a problem with advocacy.

An effective advocate uses those techniques which are most effective in each situation.

Each advocacy situation is unique, and relationships of the parties are unique. The experienced advocate will gather facts, confer with others, analyze the situation and determine the most effective method of intervention.

Depending on how the situation develops, the strategy and techniques of the advocate may change.

Advocates can also seek help from **regulatory agencies**. Regulatory agencies, broadly defined, include agencies which are required by law to oversee a service or facility, but also those who contract with others to provide the service. If an advocate is seeking to have a problem corrected, the agency or individual responsible for enforcing regulations or a contract often can be helpful.

Where serious concerns aren't addressed, an advocate may seek **legal assistance** to take the concern through the administrative hearing or civil court process. This can be costly. However, sometimes free legal services or volunteer lawyers can be found.

Where the law isn't addressing a problem, or public resources aren't adequate, **legislative action** may be necessary.

For advocates who know how to work effectively with the press, **print and electronic media** bring issues to the attention of the public. This may help individuals who suffer injustice, and also address larger public issues. However, the media are independent, and won't necessarily read a situation as you do. Care must be taken to avoid unfavorable publicity.

Types of
Advocacy

Sometimes, **protest and civil disobedience** calls attention to issues, and places pressure on officials to make needed changes. Peaceful and orderly public protest is protected by the constitution.

Civil disobedience, on the other hand, is the violation of the law to make a point or generate public sympathy for a cause. It can be effective, as it was in the civil rights era, but those involved must be willing to risk fines and even jail to make their point.

Community advocacy - also known as “systems advocacy” - is another important function of the advocate. Systems advocacy influences social and political systems to bring about changes for the benefit of groups of people.



Systems
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groups of people.

What makes an advocate?

1) Objectivity

An advocate listens and evaluates information objectively. As an advocate, you must know and recognize your own prejudices and tendencies. How effective you are as an advocate will in large part be determined by the degree of objectivity you can bring to a situation.

The degree of confidence or suspicion you have in the system, and your belief in the potential of positive change, will affect your approach to advocacy and how you interpret situations and issues you encounter. Think about what your attitudes are toward the system - individuals, providers, agencies, service consumers - and constantly reexamine your attitudes in the light of what you see.

2) Independence

To effectively and credibly advocate for others you must exercise independent judgment.

An advocate conveys interest and empathy. You will get more information and a more accurate reading of

3) Sensitivity & Understanding

what others want if you can communicate that you are listening. Good communication skills are essential.

4) Persistence & Patience

An advocate is determined and secure enough in your position to weather storms, deal with setbacks, and maintain energy over time.

5) Knowledge & Judgment

You must understand what to ask for, whom to ask, and be able to exercise judgment about what is reasonable, and what isn't. Knowledge and judgment develop over time, with experience.

6) *Assertiveness* An advocate is polite, but firm. You need to have a good working relationship with others, but they must not control you.

7) Ethics & Respect for Others

An advocate respects the privacy and confidentiality of others, and respects the basic rules of ethical conduct, to be effective and to maintain credibility.

Advocates must:

- * Be culturally sensitive.
- * Provide language accommodations.
- * Provide disability accommodations.
- * Adhere to a code of confidentiality.
- * Refrain from abusive conduct.
- * Be trustworthy and honest.

All people develop attitudes, preferences, and biases. However, in order to be an effective advocate, you must be able to recognize your own attitudes, preferences, and biases. If you don't, your attitudes are likely to interfere with your judgment. You could take positions which reflect your biases, rather than the choices of the people for whom you advocate. You may interpret the actions of others cynically, or naively, and thereby lose your ability to work effectively for the interests of others.

Working out your biases.

It is important to recognize your biases, and to periodically evaluate whether they are interfering with your judgment. The first step to not letting bias interfere with your judgment is to accept that it's there and decide to deal with it.

Recognize that your bias may be affecting your judgment.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- * Am I bothered by this situation much more than other people?
- * Am I attributing motives to others without evidence?
- * Do I strongly believe, or disbelieve, what I'm being told without compelling evidence?

Ask the opinion of others you trust.

Ask an objective person to interpret the facts. How does he or she see the situation? Just give the facts. Don't tell your consultant what you want them to see.

Take seriously any suggestions made that you're biased.

Even if you *know* that you're right, you may be too close to the situation to see solutions. If you appear biased to others, there is a good chance that some bias is motivating you, and perhaps clouding your judgment.



Identifying your Biases

Think about *why* you act, before you act.

When you decide to take a significant action, stop to consider if you are acting because it makes sense, or are you acting because you want to “get” someone. You can have strong feelings, and take decisive action, but avoid acting on your biases.

Be respectful.

Speak with respect even when you disagree with someone. Accusations and name-calling polarize discussions, and don’t lead to solutions. By showing disrespect for the other side, you give credence to any biases people have against you. If you engage in name-calling and accusations, you may provoke petty, demeaning, or even unscrupulous responses, which will further justify your own biases. When those with other views respond to you in kind, you may feel: “A ha - I knew you were like that!”

Listen to the “other side”.

Often, if you listen to what the “other side” is saying, you will find more common ground. You may discover that the “other side” is not altogether wrong. Even if you continue to disagree on most matters, you will likely discover that you and others are motivated by many of the same values, attitudes, and prejudices.

Avoid Us vs. Them thinking.

When you advocate strongly and encounter resistance, it is difficult not to think of those resisting you as “them” or “the other side”. This is “positional” negotiation or advocacy - one position versus another position. Those who have different views from your own are people, like you in some ways and different in others, but still people. Remember that you may meet “them” another day, with another issue, and it makes sense to start the work of building a relationship of mutual respect *now*.

Stay connected with those for whom you are advocating.

Make sure you are asking for what others want. Your strategy may change, but your focus should be clear and remain constant. Check periodically that your efforts are collaborative and everyone is in agreement with the approach.

Advocacy Pitfalls

Advocacy is not:

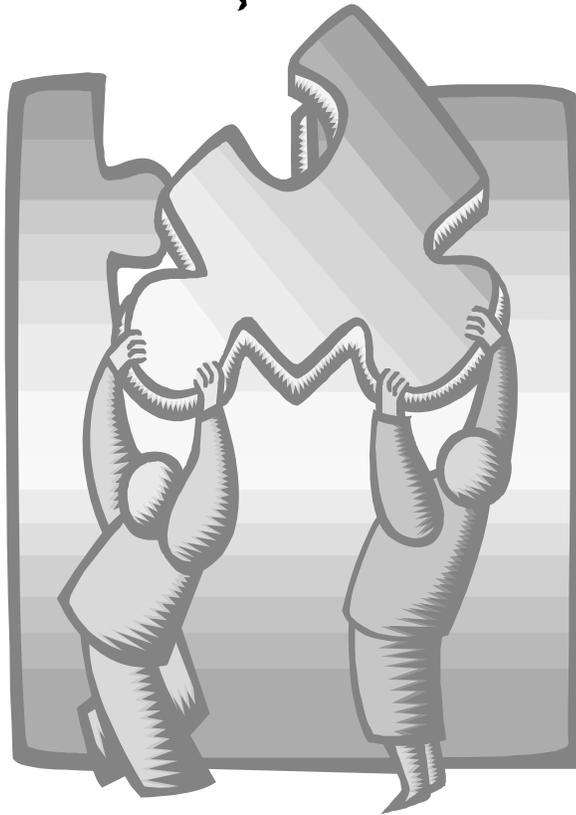
- substituting your beliefs as an advocate for the beliefs of others
- creating conflict for its own sake
- a chance to get even for past wrongs done to you
- an opportunity to make yourself feel powerful at the expense of others

The Elements of your Advocacy Plan



Assessing the problem

1



●

Break down the problem

What do you want to change? Who is affected by the problem? Is there more than one problem? Separate and prioritize them.

Set goals

What would solve the problem? What is the best outcome? What is the worst? What compromises would you make to reach a resolution? What would you refuse to give up?

Recognize your Biases

What perceptions do you have about the other side that might impede your efforts? Assess your emotions carefully. Focus on ways to channel anger, resentment, or anxiety, rather than letting emotions sabotage your efforts.

Be objective What does the other side want? Step into their shoes. What obstacles do they face?

Troubleshoot early What are the potential obstacles to getting the resolution you want? How will you acquire resources needed to reach your goals?

Determine Allies

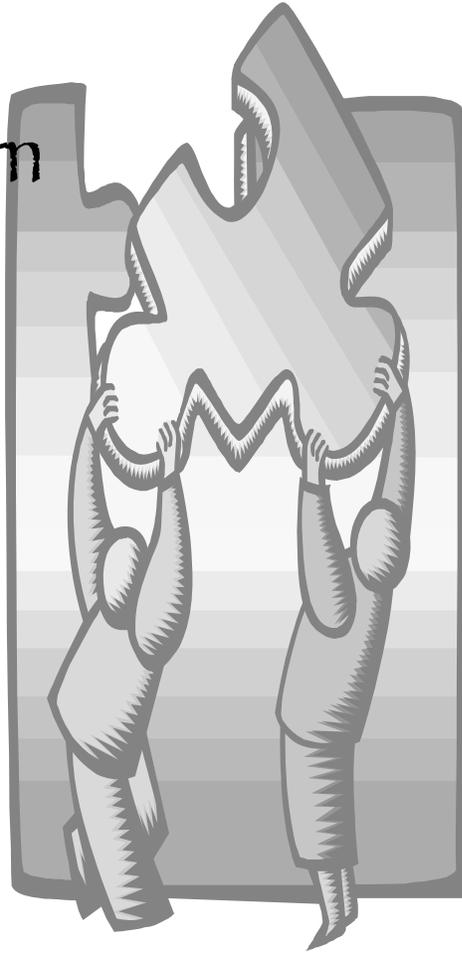
Where can you go for help or advice? Who is on your side? Who is not on your side? How do you convince neutral parties to take your side?

Balance information against advocacy style and talents

Based on the information you already have, what are the talents you have to best reach a resolution? Are you a good writer? Are you an articulate speaker? Do you work well with media? Are you more aggressive or do you prefer a less direct approach? How have you solved problems in the past?

Forming an advocacy team

2



Find the Common Cause

What is the goal of the group? How do the immediate problems fit into the big picture? Out of all the conflicting interests and wishes, what is the most important issue that everyone want to be addressed? A unified mission fosters commitment and helps everyone stay focused.

Troubleshoot conflicting interests within

Are group members willing to sacrifice self-interests or personal agendas for the good of the group, or the group's mission? Are there conflicts of interest that need to be resolved or addressed to ensure everyone will be able to work together?

Establish structure

What is the regularity of meetings, type of facilitation, etc. What is the communication process between meetings? Think through resources needed, i.e. a place to meet, teleconferencing, printing costs, etc. Build into your structure a method to evaluate progress regularly.

Establish decision-making process

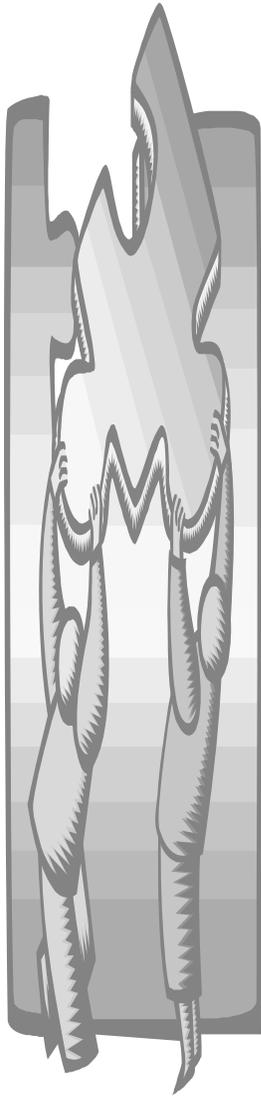
As a group, decide what the formal structure for planning and decision making will be. Is there a steering committee? Do members vote on issues? Is the communication process formal or informal? Is there a figure head for your group? Who speaks for the group to media or other groups?

Match group talents with your plan

What are the talents in your group? Do you have motivating speakers? Strong writing skills? Mediation and negotiation abilities? Do you know someone who has dealt with this or similar circumstances before? What have they done? Internally assess group skills, talents, interests, resources and allies.

Make sure everyone is at the table

Who has inside information or expertise about the problem? Be careful not to avoid those within a seemingly-opposed organization. Some of your best allies may come from those who work within a system and understand how to get around its shortcomings, or who also wish to challenge the same issues you face in your coalition.



Gather information & form solutions

3

Research ~ Research ~ Research

Gather all the information you need. Look for existing laws, policies and contracts that apply to what you are trying to change. Think through the best places to find this information. You may need to interview professionals, research libraries or the internet. Look for radio or TV documentaries, written media and educational materials. There may be budgets or other public information that is relevant. What information do you have a right to access? Even when something is public information, accessing it can at times be tricky and require some strategizing.

Examine what's been done before

Have others in your community worked on this issue before? Has there been successful resolution in your community or somewhere else? Analyze information for what has worked, and what hasn't.

Research the opposition

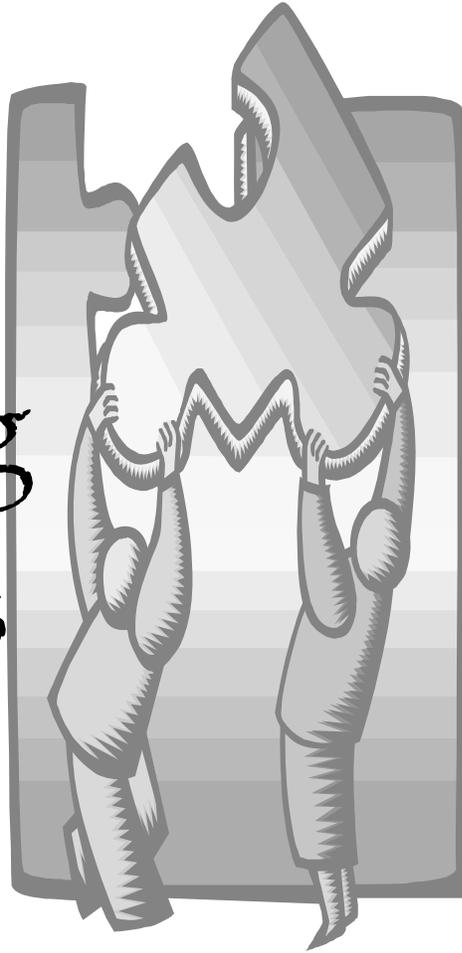
Understanding the opposition's interest and approach to the issue will improve your strategy. This will generate win-win solutions, uncover obstacles you may face, and help you avoid strategic mistakes.

Create a paper trail

Closely document all of your research. You may need proof of your findings down the road, and others will benefit from what you have discovered and what you have done.

4.

Choosing strategies



Look for low-level solutions

Litigation and media scandals can be expensive and embarrassing, and may permanently damage successful working relationships. Look to resolve problems at the lowest possible level. Seek compromises that benefit both sides and maintain working relationships while producing the results you want. If low-level strategies don't work, you may need to try a higher-level approach.

Strategies

Determining which strategy is best will depend on your group goals, talents and the barriers you face. Pros and cons of each approach should be carefully evaluated, especially where media or courts are involved. Strategies to consider are:

1) **Policy reform**

Filing a formal complaint or following procedural grievance processes can sometimes yield the result that you want. It may also be beneficial utilizing ombudsman programs, quality assurance systems, etc. You may want to attend public meetings or join a board or commission. Look for public officials who are interested in your issue.

2) **Organized community response**

Mobilize email lists, community groups or other interested parties to “flood with complaints” by responding to an issue with letters, email responses, telephone complaints, etc.

3) **Dispute resolution**

This includes mediation, negotiation and other conflict resolution.

4) **Media**

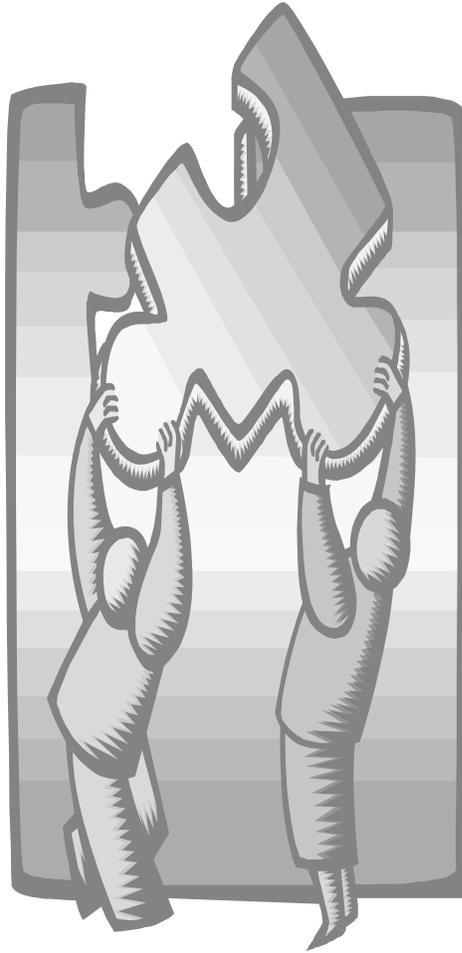
Media can be a very effective advocacy tool, but it requires skill and careful consideration to ensure the news coverage is objective and accurate, and that it doesn't come back to haunt you. What is your accessibility to media? Would this be a story of interest? What stories, if any, already exist about this problem? What media organizations are sympathetic to your cause?

5) **Legal**

Find out what your rights are and what legal strategies would work. An attorney can help by drafting letters, giving advice, appearing at meetings or by filing a lawsuit.

5.

Writing your plan



Start with your solution

Your plan will change as you go and require continual critique. Keep your goal foremost in your mind. That will help you stay on task.

Break down steps to reaching solutions

Be specific. Who does what? When do things happen?
What is your timeline?

Organize and prioritize activities

What takes priority and needs to happen immediately? Which tasks are easier than others and can be handled more quickly? What is the logical sequence of events?

Continually evaluate progress as a group

At regular intervals ask the group if everyone feels the approach is on target. Are your strategies working? Look for new opportunities for other approaches. This will generate more solutions. What would make things easier? What lessons have been learned in the process?

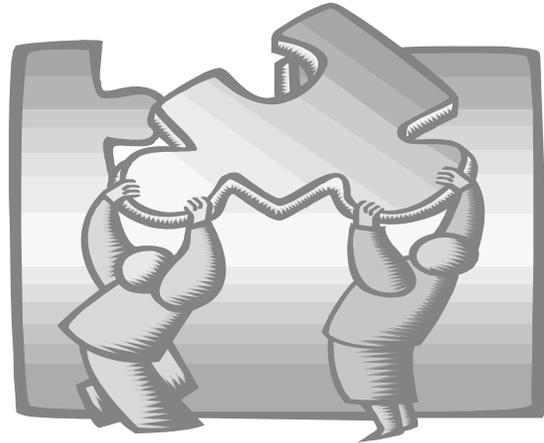
Be on the lookout for new allies

Look for others interested in your cause. Have others offered assistance? How can you utilize their help?

Prepare for when the going gets tough

Listen to criticism carefully. Sometimes others have good input or advice. Remind yourself of what you are trying to accomplish. It may require discipline not to rise to others' bait. Be careful not to allow your reaction to criticism to become your focus. This will rapidly pull you away from your goal.

6. Follow Up



Make sure you have an agreement

You've done it! You've reached a resolution and attained your advocacy goals. Not so fast, though—before you celebrate, you want to make sure your agreement does what you want it to do! Your agreement should:

- 1) Be written
- 2) Be enforceable
- 3) Spell out what happens if people don't live up to the agreement
- 4) Have methods for follow-up

Examine resolution for remaining advocacy

Is there more work to be done?
Do you have the basis for another advocacy plan?

Evaluate your advocacy plan

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- Did you reach your solution?
- Did you meet your personal and group goals?
- What could be improved for next time?
- What have you learned?

Building My Plan: An Advocacy Workbook



Barriers

Barrier

Ideas for overcoming barriers

Opponents

Name

Why opposed?

What can be done to change opponents' mind?

Decision-Makers

Name of Decision-maker

Job/Position

What is the interest of each decision maker?

Resources you have

Name of Supporter

Talent/Skill/Resources

Resources you need, but don't have

Telephone, email, volunteers/paid staff, meeting place, accountant, etc.

Name of Resource

How you will obtain (describe)

2. Forming an advocacy group

Decision-making

1. How will decisions be made?

___ majority vote of all group members?

___ consensus of all group members?

___ leadership will make decisions under following circumstances:

2. How will decisions be made when there is no time to consult with others in group?

Group Communication

How will group members be kept up to date?

——newsletter or mailing

——email

——phone

——other

Describe how communication will work?

Meetings

Who will call meetings?

When and where will meetings occur?

Who will lead the discussion, and how will the meeting be conducted?

3. Information Gathering

Information you need:

Laws, Regulations, Policies and Contracts that apply to your problem

Who enforces these laws, regulations, policies and contracts?

How will you keep track of information you gather?

How will other members of the group learn what you find?

Opponent's position:

What support is there for your opponent's position?

What has been done before?

Have others in your community worked on this problem before? What happened?

In other locations, have advocates found solutions to this problem?

4. Strategies

Policy Reform:

Discuss pros and cons of trying to change policies as a way to solve your problem.

Can committees, boards, commissions, or other bodies help solve your problem?

Can public officials, heads of businesses, or other policy-makers make changes which will help your problem?

Organized Community Response

If many complaints were made by others, would it help your problem? If yes, what is the most efficient way to organize this?

Dispute Resolution Process

What is the resource for mediation or other dispute resolution in your community? What are the pros and cons of using mediation?

Media

Who in the media would be helpful to you?

What about your problem would be interesting to the media? (Angle)

Carefully consider possible risks and benefits of media coverage.

6. Evaluation

Did you meet your advocacy goals and objectives?

What did you accomplish?

What was not completed?

What worked well?

What did not work well?

How could it be better next time?



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