

# **SPEAK OUT:** **HOW TO ADVOCATE TO CHANGE SOCIAL POLICY**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this article is to provide practical guidance regarding advocacy to bring about social change. The underlying premise is that to bring about change, you must speak out. That is a right—and a responsibility—we all have in a democracy. But to speak out effectively, you have to do more. You have to join with other advocates. You have to join advocacy organizations that already exist or you have to work with others to create new advocacy organizations. You have to build a constituency for change. You have to know what you are talking about. You have to develop a practical plan. And you have to take action. Ultimately advocacy is action—not just talk about action.

### **The Value of Speaking Out**

- ❑ **People who care about social policy can be, and have been, powerful forces in moving the American society in progressive directions.**
- ❑ **This includes people directly affected by inadequate social policies.**
- ❑ **It includes concerned citizens.**
- ❑ **It includes service providers.**
- ❑ **It includes professional social advocates.**
- ❑ **All people who care about social policy have important stories to tell and information to provide to policy makers.**
- ❑ **Public officials--especially elected officials--like to hear directly from the people their decisions will affect.**

## **SECTION I: WHAT IS SOCIAL POLICY ADVOCACY?**

- ❑ This article is about advocacy for changes in social policy in the systems through which people in need are, or are not, helped with the problems they confront. These problems include homelessness, poverty, and discrimination. They include unemployment and illiteracy. They include physical and mental illnesses and disabilities. They include family violence against children, spouses, and elders. They include social isolation and much, much more.
- ❑ This article is **not** about how to advocate for individuals on a case-by-case basis.

- ❑ Advocacy for individuals is very important work, but is an art of its own. It focuses on helping people get what they need and want from systems as they are currently structured.
- ❑ Policy advocacy is based on the realization that some people cannot get what they need from systems as they are currently structured and that helping them therefore requires changing the systems. Systems change entails changes in public, or private organizational, policy.
- ❑ You and the organizations you are part of need to decide what changes you think are important. Homes for all, full employment, universal health coverage, improved education in poor communities, a strong social security system, reduction of violence, anti-discrimination laws, or enhanced mental health services. These are just a few of the social changes sought by social advocates. What is your greatest concern?
- ❑ Trying to persuade government, or the private sector, to make changes in social policy so as to help achieve these goals is the kind of advocacy that this article is about.

### **What is social policy?**

- ❑ Social policy consists of laws, regulations, plans, program models, licensing standards, budgets, financing models, organizational policies and procedures, etc.
- ❑ These elements of policy are derived from broad visions of the role of society in helping people with problems.
- ❑ For example from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century until the mid-1990's government accepted a responsibility to provide income supports in the community for families with dependent children. Now government has set a time limit on public assistance as an incentive for people to go to work, drawing from a controversial vision of "personal responsibility." Similarly, until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, public mental health policy was institution-based. For the past 50 years, it has been based on a vision of people with mental illnesses leading free and satisfying lives in the community. This is also a controversial vision.

### **Who Makes Social Policy?**

- ❑ Public social policy is made by legislatures, by elected chief executives such as the President, governors, and mayors, by their appointees such as commissioners, and by the courts.
- ❑ Some social policy is made by the private sector. For example, in the U.S., most people's health benefits are provided by their employers, who decide whether and to what extent to provide health coverage and other employee benefits including pensions, disability and life insurance, etc.

### **Why Change Social Policy?**

- ❑ Most people believe that the American social system is inadequate.
- ❑ Conservatives generally believe that it is too generous and gives too much power to the federal government. They believe that the social welfare system creates disincentives to work and to take responsibility for oneself and one's family.

- ❑ Liberals generally believe that America neglects people who are struggling to survive and make decent lives for themselves. They generally support increased protections for workers and their families, a strong social security system, more generous benefits, universal health coverage, anti-discrimination measures, and the like.
- ❑ Radicals generally believe that the capitalistic structure of the American system is inherently unjust and that it should be dramatically changed so as to promote meaningful equality.
- ❑ Whether you are a conservative, a liberal, or a radical, you are likely to believe that our society needs major changes in social policy so as to promote your vision of social justice.

### **How To Change Social Policy: The Framework for This Article**

- ❑ You need to **work in advocacy groups to be effective.**
- ❑ Effective **advocacy requires planning.**
- ❑ Sound advocacy plans rest on **a good assessment** of need, policy, history, cost, and politics.
- ❑ A sound advocacy plan has three parts: an **agenda**, a **strategy**, and **tactics**.
- ❑ The **agenda** consists of your advocacy goals. Perhaps what you think is important is ending homelessness, universal health coverage, and quality education for all. Your “agenda” would include those goals. These are just examples, of course. You may have totally different social goals.
- ❑ The **strategy** identifies what private or public organizations and officials you are going to try to reach in order to bring about the changes that you want to achieve. It is based on an analysis of who has the power to achieve your goals, of who can influence those with power, and of what will persuade them to do what you want them to. Usually there is more than one person or organization with the power to do what you want. Your strategy is your selection of which point(s) of power to focus your efforts on, your sense of what will motivate them to change policy, and your selection of advocacy partners.
- ❑ **Tactics** are the methods that you use to carry out your strategy and to achieve your goals. Once you know what you want to achieve and decide which powers-that-be you want to reach and what you think will motivate them, you need to develop a detailed plan about how to carry out your strategy. Will you organize a letter writing campaign? Will you seek a face-to-face meeting? Will you demonstrate? Will you try to get headlines? These specific actions constitute your “tactics.”
- ❑ Planning must lead to action, and sometimes action cannot wait for a refined plan.

<b>ADVOCACY IS ACTION</b>
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## **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

**Register to vote and vote.**

**Contact your elected and appointed public officials.**

**Join an advocacy group.**

**Make a financial contribution to an advocacy group.**

**Participate in actions organized by an advocacy group  
such as letter writing or attending lobby days.**

**Work and provide leadership for an advocacy group.**

## **ADVOCACY PLANNING**

### **ASSESSMENT:**

What is the need? The problem?

What is the current policy?

What is the history of the policy and of advocacy to change it?

What is the political context?

How much will the desired change cost?

### **AGENDA:**

What are your goals?

### **STRATEGY:**

Who has power?

Who has influence?

What will motivate them to change policy?

Who can be good advocacy partners?

### **TACTICS:**

How will you persuade the powers-that-be to change policy?

Lobbying?

Public education?

Demonstrations?

Court Action?

Social Defiance?

## **SECTION II: ADVOCACY GROUPS**

### **ADVOCACY IS MOST EFFECTIVE IN GROUPS**

#### **Why Advocacy Depends on Working in Groups**

- ❑ On rare occasions, individuals working alone have been able to capture public attention and persuade public officials to make changes in policy. But for the most part, advocacy must take place through groups because (1) in a democracy change only takes place when there are many voters who support change, (2) advocacy takes a lot of work, (3) working in groups helps to test ideas, and (4) groups can capture public and media interest better than individuals working alone.
- ❑ There are many kinds of advocacy organizations including:
  - ❑ Cause groups such as the Mental Health Association or Children's Defense Fund
  - ❑ Trade associations such as The American Hospital Association or The Child Welfare League of America
  - ❑ Professional associations such as the National Association of Social Workers or the American Medical Association
  - ❑ Citizens' groups such as The Citizens' Committee for Children
  - ❑ Membership groups such as the American Association of Retired People
  - ❑ Population focused groups such as the NAACP
  - ❑ Faith-based groups such as Catholic Charities
  - ❑ Fundraising and distributing groups such United Way
  - ❑ And more.
- ❑ An internet search will easily turn up a number of organizations which reflect your interests.

#### **Join An Advocacy Group**

#### **What you can do as a member**

- ❑ All advocacy groups need money to do their work. Making a financial contribution is very important.
- ❑ If you join an advocacy group, you will get mail or E-mail from time to time asking you to write to or telephone certain people. Your letter or call helps to show that many people care about the issue.
- ❑ You will also be asked to attend events where it is important that large numbers of people turn out. For example many organizations have lobby days in State Capitols or in Washington, DC.
- ❑ Of course, you can also choose to do much more.

- ❑ Advocacy requires a lot of work. You will make yourself very popular and important in your group by volunteering to do anything that needs to be done.
- ❑ When you have the opportunity to attend a meeting to discuss an advocacy plan, you should feel free to speak up. But remember that if you are new, listening may be more valuable than speaking. As in all groups, it takes a while to be a fully accepted member whose opinions are welcome and respected.
- ❑ Keep in mind that the purpose of discussion is not just for everyone to voice his or her opinion. It is to help the group make a decision about what it will do.

❑ **ADVOCACY IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT ACTION NOT ABOUT TALK.**

- ❑ Once a decision is made, everyone in the group must back it. Differences of opinion are fine in the privacy of the group, but are very damaging if aired in public.

❑ **EFFECTIVE ACTION REQUIRES THAT PEOPLE STAND TOGETHER.  
"UNITED WE STAND; DIVIDED WE FALL."**

### **Leadership functions in advocacy groups**

- ❑ **Chairing a meeting:** Good meetings allow participants to feel like valued members and enable them to join forces on some plan of action. Most meetings allow for differences of opinions to be expressed, but good meetings also have a sense of order and move to a meaningful conclusion.
- ❑ **Building consensus:** To be effective, groups must reach agreement and take action together. There are no general rules about how to build consensus. It is a skill that varies from person to person.
- ❑ **Communication and Advocacy Materials:** One of the most important functions in an advocacy group is preparing written materials both for advocacy and for communication within the group.
  - ❑ Advocacy materials include letters to public officials, position papers, press releases, etc.
  - ❑ Communications materials include letters to members, newsletters, minutes of meetings, etc. Many groups now use E-mail as the major mechanism for communication within their group.
- ❑ **Being out front with public officials and the media:** Many people find this frightening. But advocacy groups need people who are able to speak out publicly even if they are nervous about it.
- ❑ **Follow through:** If you get the work done that you agree to do, you will be perceived as a leader.

## **Forming New Groups**

Although there are a great many social advocacy groups, you may believe that none of them adequately represents your interests and beliefs and decide that you want to form a new advocacy group. What does this take?

- ❑ Identify people or organizations with mutual interests.
- ❑ Meet with as many of them as you can individually before you convene the first meeting of a group.
- ❑ These meetings will build your base of knowledge about the issues and about the points of view and interests of the people you meet.
- ❑ Negotiate some issues regarding goals and leadership roles with key players before the first meeting.
- ❑ Convene an exploratory or planning meeting. At this meeting you should:
  - ❑ Identify mutual interests
  - ❑ Begin to develop shared positions
  - ❑ Begin to develop an agreeable structure
  - ❑ Develop an action plan
- ❑ Follow up on the action plan.
- ❑ Convene subsequent meetings consistent with the action plan. But do not have meetings before the actions agreed to at the prior meeting have been undertaken. Above all, carefully avoid having the second meeting be a repeat of the first meeting.

## **Constituency Building**

- ❑ Both existing and newly formed groups need to work constantly to maintain and increase their membership and to build a cadre of people who support their cause.
- ❑ This is called "constituency building."
- ❑ To build a constituency, a group needs to reach out to people and to try to engage them.
- ❑ It is important to identify which people you want to involve in your group. For example if your group represents families of adults with serious mental illnesses, do you want to limit membership to family members or be more inclusive?
  - ❑ Bigger groups generally have more impact, but the more diverse the membership the less focused the message.
  - ❑ There's no right choice. It's your decision.

- ❑ You can reach people through direct contact, through mailings to relevant groups, and through public education activities such as speeches, conferences, websites, and written material.
- ❑ From these outreach efforts you need to develop a mailing list.
- ❑ Remember that most people do not have time to be active participants in your group, but many will send letters, make calls, or even appear at advocacy events if they know about them.
- ❑ Communication is critical. Newsletters, issues alerts, calls for action must go out routinely to give your constituency a sense that your group is active and that they are involved.

**❑ WORK CONSTANTLY AT BUILDING A CONSTITUENCY**

**ADVOCACY DEPENDS ON WORKING IN GROUPS**

- ❑ JOIN A GROUP
  - ❑ MAKE A FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION
- ❑ SEND LETTERS AND MAKE CALLS ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP
  - ❑ ATTEND PUBLIC EVENTS ORGANIZED BY THE GROUP
    - ❑ PARTICIPATE IN CREATING THE ADVOCACY PLAN AND DOING THE WORK FOR A GROUP
    - ❑ BECOME A LEADER OF YOUR GROUP
    - ❑ CREATE A NEW GROUP IF NEEDED

**SECTION III: CREATING AN AGENDA: SELECTING GOALS**

**It's Not As Easy As It Sounds**

- ❑ Since an advocacy agenda is fundamentally a list of your advocacy goals, it sounds like a pretty simple thing to do. It turns out, however, that it's not as simple as it sounds.

**The Eight P's**

- ❑ In general goals need to be carefully thought through and formulated in terms which are clear to potential members of your group, to people who have the power to change policy, and to those who can influence the powers-that-be, such as the press.

- To develop a thoughtful agenda you may find it useful to consider each of the following “eight P’s”.

- **Population**

Which population do you want to help? Suppose that your goal is to improve the quality of life for people who are poor. While this is a noble goal, it is vague. Do you mean all people who are poor? Children, adults, and geriatrics? In your locality or state, in the United States, in the world? People who are poor temporarily or people entrenched in long-term poverty? People who are poor due to disability or people who are poor due to choices they have made or life’s circumstances?

Suppose that your concern is people entrenched in inter-generational poverty in Harlem. Then your goal would be to improve the quality of life and perhaps opportunities for social mobility for people who are members of the “underclass” who live in Harlem.

- **Problem**

This is still a nebulous goal. What's wrong with the quality of life of people trapped in long-term poverty in Harlem? What's the problem(s)? There are many possible answers. One is that they are frequently homeless or live in housing which is shabby and dangerous. Another is that they cannot get jobs. Another is that they live in neighborhoods that are violent. Another is that they do not get access to good health care. Another is that their children get poor education. Another is that they are exposed to the temptations of drugs and crime. Different people have different views.

Suppose you think the major problems are lack of safe and decent housing and risk of violence. Then your goals might be to provide affordable, decent housing and to provide better crime control in Harlem. Such goals begin to be specific enough to mount a meaningful advocacy effort.

**The Choice of Language in Describing the Population and the Problem**

Some people might find the use of the expression "the underclass" objectionable. They might want to overcome the same problems for the same people but would use other expressions such as "the estranged poor" or “victims of the oppression of a capitalist society.” Terminology is very important in formulating your goals. You need to choose terminology that is acceptable to the people in your advocacy group. But you also need to gear your language to the people who have the power to make changes in public policy.

- **Proposed Solution**

In addition to specifying the population and describing the problem, it is useful to give some idea of how the problem can be overcome. For example, you may believe that the best way to make decent housing available is for The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development to renovate shabby housing and turn the buildings over to a local community development organization, which will make the

housing available to local residents using a sweat equity approach. And you may think that the best way to reduce street violence is for the NYC Police Department to crack down on crime. Now you are getting close to being specific enough to formulate an action plan.

#### ❑ **Policy**

In addition to proposing a solution to the problem you have identified, it is very helpful if you can specify how to change policy. What is the current policy? How should it be changed? How much will it cost?

The amount of knowledge it takes to do this is daunting to many would-be advocates. Don't hesitate to go to the powers-that-be just because you don't know everything you need to know. They can help you learn, and they can actually help you refine your agenda in ways that will make it more feasible. Besides, it is really the people in government who have the responsibility to take your concerns and shape them into public policy.

You can also recruit or hire policy experts.

#### ❑ **Possibility**

Another consideration in developing an agenda is how idealistic or realistic you want it to be. **Politics is the art of the possible.** Ultimately it takes compromise to get policy changes that approximate your ideal goals. But advocates who insist on achieving certain ideals serve a very useful function on the stage of advocacy. Players at the extreme edges of an issue are necessary to define an acceptable middle ground. Some advocates, therefore, must be stubborn extremists while others are more realistic negotiators. Whether to tilt your agenda towards the extreme or the middle is up to you.

#### ❑ **Preservation and Development of Your Advocacy Group**

In order to achieve your advocacy goals, you need a strong group. What will it take to keep your group together and active? What will it take to make it stronger and more effective? In addition to desired systems changes, your advocacy agenda may need to include specific goals related to preserving the group, enlarging the group, or improving the group's public image and visibility.

#### ❑ **Priorities**

How many issues should be on your advocacy agenda? Some advocates insist that it must be a very few. Others argue that you should address the issues that are very important to the population you are trying to help even if there are a great many issues.

There is no correct answer. The scope of your advocacy agenda should depend on:

- ❑ How much work can your organization take on?
- ❑ How many issues will the powers-that-be pay attention to at any given time?
- ❑ How many issues have to be on the agenda to hold the advocacy group together?

□ **The Process of Selecting Goals**

A group's agenda usually arises from a group discussion and debate. The passions of the members of the group and their relationships with each other will have a great impact on the group process, whether agreement is achieved, and what is on the agenda. A good chairperson is essential.

Some groups end up with long agendas to hold the group together. This is a perfectly good reason to have a long agenda, though it sometimes leads to struggles about priorities later in the process.

**THE 8 P'S OF SETTING AN AGENDA**

**Population**

Who Needs Help?

**Problem**

What's Wrong?

**Proposed Solution**

How Do You Think The Problem Can Best Be Overcome?

**Policy**

What Policies Need To Change?  
How Should They Be Changed?  
How Much Will It Cost?

**Possibility**

What's Achievable?  
Are You Willing To Compromise?

**Preservation and Development of Your Advocacy Group**

What Is Needed To Preserve Your Group?  
What Is Needed To Make Your Group Stronger?

**Priorities**

What's Most Important?

**Process**

Who Needs To Agree?  
How Will You Get Agreement?

## **SECTION IV: STRATEGY**

### **WHICH POWERS-THAT-BE TO INFLUENCE AND HOW**

#### **Power**

- ❑ It takes power to make change. You must sort out whether the power to bring about change is in the public or the private sector or both. And you must identify specifically which organizations, parts of organizations, offices, and people have power to bring about the changes that you want to achieve.
- ❑ If this is a governmental issue, is it a federal, a state, county, or municipal issue?
- ❑ Is your issue a legislative, executive, or judicial issue?
- ❑ It is likely that more than one level and branch of government have power regarding your goals.
  - ❑ Because the Chief Executive usually must sign a law, making law requires cooperation of legislative and executive branches.
  - ❑ Governmental budgets are key to carrying out mental health policy and are also joint products of the legislative and executive branches.
- ❑ You will need detailed information about the structure of federal, state, county, and municipal governments to formulate a strategy.
- ❑ For information, check [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov). In addition every state and most local governments have web sites.
- ❑ Keep in mind that it is as important to know how power works informally as how it is officially structured.
- ❑ Determining who has power and which of the people or organizations with power to try to persuade to make changes is the first element of developing a strategy.

#### **Influence**

- ❑ Some people have "influence" rather than power.
- ❑ Powerful people can produce change through their own decision-making, either alone or with others.
- ❑ People with influence have access to people with power and may be able to persuade them how to act.
- ❑ The chairman of the political party to which the Chief Executive belongs probably has influence. A friend or relative may also have influence, as may a recognized and trusted

expert in your area of social policy. A large contributor probably has influence. The news media certainly have influence.

- ❑ Determining who has influence is the second element of formulating an advocacy strategy.

### **Know Your Elected Officials**

- ❑ Elected officials represent you in the federal, the state, county, and municipal governments. The most basic step of advocacy is to know who your elected officials are.
- ❑ To find out who your elected officials are and where you can reach them call your local **League of Women Voters** or **Board of Elections**. Also check [www.firstgov.gov](http://www.firstgov.gov).
- ❑ Next you need to sort out which of the elected officials have power, which have influence, and which have neither.
- ❑ For example, in the legislative branch of government, there will be committees which handle the issues you are concerned about. You will need to know what they are, who chairs them, and who the members are.

### **Know The Appointed Officials**

- ❑ In the executive branch there are many government agencies composed of public officials who often have considerable power. It is important to know both who heads the agencies and who heads various divisions within the agencies.
- ❑ It is also important to know that there are usually people on the staff of the Chief Executive who are the liaisons with executive departments. Sometimes they have more power than the heads of these departments.

### **Determine Whether A Court Ruling In Your Favor is Possible**

- ❑ People who believe that something is unjust frequently think that the courts can be used to right the injustice.
- ❑ The courts have played a significant role in many matters such as requiring racial integration and assuring the rights of minorities and people with disabilities.
- ❑ But the courts can only act on the basis of existing law or the Constitutions of the nation or the states.
- ❑ Often it is just not possible for the court to be helpful.

### **Motivation**

- ❑ Once you have identified the people with power and influence, you need to figure out what will persuade them to help you.
- ❑ Like all of us, people with power or influence have mixed motivations.

- ❑ What mix of ideals, values, emotions, self-interest, and politics will help you win over the people you need on your side?
  - ❑ Better lives for the people you are concerned about
  - ❑ Appropriate interpretation of the law
  - ❑ Having a family member or a friend afflicted with the problem that concerns you
  - ❑ The impact a change will have on voters or contributors
  - ❑ Building a political reputation of kindness and concern
  - ❑ Avoiding bad publicity
  - ❑ Doing what the boss wants

### **Form Strategic Partnerships**

- ❑ In advocacy greater numbers generally mean greater power, and some advocates and advocacy groups have greater access to power than others.
- ❑ For this reason, it often makes sense to work jointly with other advocacy organizations.
- ❑ Keep in mind that some people and groups simply cannot work together and that it sometimes takes a very long time to form strategic partnerships.
- ❑ Don't lose opportunities for action because you hope for a partnership.
- ❑ But don't give up too easily on forming partnerships. Remember "United we stand, divided we fall!"

### **EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY DEPENDS ON GOOD RELATIONSHIPS**

- ❑ To be effective at advocacy, you must form good working relationships with people who have power, people who have influence, and people who can be partners in action.

### **An Example of Advocacy Strategy: The Reinvestment Act of 1993**

Towards the end of the 1980's a number of mental health advocacy organizations in New York State became concerned that they were weakening each other's advocacy efforts by advocating for different goals. They decided to formulate a common agenda and to advocate for it together. They formed The Mental Health Action Network of New York State.

After a couple of years of mixed success, they decided to focus on a single theme, which they called "reinvestment." The notion was simple. The state was closing beds in state hospitals and was not providing adequate services for people in the community. Their position was that savings from closing state hospital beds should be reinvested in new services in the community.

In order to move this agenda, they had to choose an advocacy strategy. Achieving a mandate for reinvestment through the courts was clearly not feasible. The policy either could be adopted voluntarily by The Governor and the Office of Mental Health or it could be set in law by the state legislature. The

advocates decided reinvestment policy would be more stable as state law than merely as the policy of the current state administration. So they chose a legislative strategy.

They knew that a legislative strategy would require that they get support from the chairs of the mental health committees of the Assembly and the Senate. So they turned to them to sponsor the legislation. Both were impressed with the idea and with the coalition of advocates and agreed to sponsor a bill.

The Governor proved to be more difficult, and his reservations affected not only the likelihood that legislation would be signed but also made it less likely that the legislative house controlled by his party would ultimately support the legislation.

The Mental Health Action Network decided that it needed a media strategy and developed a basic story about the mental health system, stressing the irrationality of closing hospital beds without developing services and supports in the community. The story drew heavily on the fact of homelessness and the widespread belief that there was a clear relationship between homelessness and mental illness. The story stressed that reinvestment could result in community-based services to prevent homelessness at no additional cost to the state. It would simply redirect money from state psychiatric centers to community-based services. The Mental Health Action Network carried the message to newspapers throughout New York State and ultimately got support for reinvestment from virtually every newspaper.

The message was also carried through vigils, rallies, and letter writing campaigns on which people with psychiatric disabilities, their families, and mental health professionals worked closely together.

The idea of addressing a major social problem at no additional cost to the state was politically irresistible. Local state legislators wanted to move ahead, and their desire to pass the law as well as consensus among the media created more and more pressure on the Governor. Eventually he conceded, after negotiating changes to the bill that focused the bill more clearly on people who were homeless.

This, of course, is a vastly oversimplified telling of the story. But what can we learn from it?

### **Lessons of the Campaign for Reinvestment**

- ❑ Strategy begins with identifying who has the power to make a policy change and deciding which of the powers-that-be to target. The Mental Health Action Network decided on a legislative strategy.
- ❑ Carrying out a legislative strategy entails getting support from the chairs of the mental health committees in each house, from the leadership of each house, and from The Governor.
- ❑ It is important for the most influential members of the entire mental health community--including people with psychiatric disabilities, their families, and mental health professionals--to join forces.
- ❑ A persuasive advocacy story has to be formulated which has widespread ideological appeal.
- ❑ Media support ultimately carried the day.

# **STRATEGY**

## **Public or Private Sector?**

### **What Level of Government Has The Power To Change Policy?**

Federal? State? County? Municipal?

### **What Branch of Government Has The Power To Change Policy?**

Legislative? Executive? Judicial?

### **Which Specific Offices and People Have The Power to Change Policy?**

Which elected officials?  
Which appointed officials?  
Which court?

## **Who Has Influence?**

Respected Experts?  
Colleagues?  
Party Officials and Contributors?  
Friends and Family?  
The Press?

## **What Will Motivate Them To Help?**

Ideology?  
Law?  
Relationships?  
Politics?  
A Good Story?  
Pressure?

## **Should You Form A Strategic Partnership?**

With whom?  
Is It Feasible?  
What Compromises Are Required?  
Will It Result In Delay?

## **Have You Developed Good Working Relationships?**

## **SECTION V: TACTICS**

### **METHODS TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE**

Tactics are specific methods to bring about change. There are five primary ways to bring about change--**lobbying, public education, demonstrations, court action, and social defiance.**

<h4><b><u>TECHNIQUES OF LOBBYING</u></b></h4>
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- ❑ “Lobbying” is any effort to **directly influence** elected or appointed public officials. (Legal definitions of “lobbying” vary from state to state. Check lobbying laws to find out whether you have to register as a lobbyist and make reports.)
- ❑ Unfortunately "lobbying" has a negative connotation in our society.
- ❑ The image of lobbying as a form of political corruption neglects the fact that lobbying is an essential function in a representative democracy.

#### **Meetings**

- ❑ The term "lobbying" comes from discussions with legislators that used to take place in lobbies outside legislative chambers.
- ❑ As the term implies, direct meetings with public officials are a very effective way to lobby.
- ❑ Such meetings usually take place in the public official's office, but you can also arrange for the public official to come to a meeting of your group.
- ❑ Direct telephone conversations with public officials can also be very useful.
- ❑ You should prepare carefully for a meeting with a public official. A written agenda helps.
- ❑ Think carefully about what you want to say. Try to formulate your ideas clearly and briefly. Keep in mind that most public officials--especially elected officials--will not be familiar with the issue that concerns you. They have too many issues to deal with to be able to know more than a very few in depth.
- ❑ At the beginning of the meeting you should always thank the public official for taking the time to meet with you. These are people who deserve your respect, and you should be sure to show it.
- ❑ You should give the public official **a one-page statement** of your positions at the beginning of the meeting with copies for any staff members who are also at the meeting. Written material is important as a reminder of your views after you leave. But it must be brief.
- ❑ You can attach more detailed material to the one-page statement.

- ❑ It is not unusual in meetings with public officials not to cover your full agenda or even to drift to topics you hadn't planned to talk about. Don't worry about it as long as the meeting has been engaging for the public official. That will help you develop a relationship which will make it possible for you to work with the public official over time.

### **Working with staff**

- ❑ Sometimes it is not possible to get a meeting directly with a public official. Usually you will be able to meet with someone on the public official's staff.
- ❑ Don't be disappointed. Meeting with staff can be very effective. Sometimes it is more effective than meeting with the elected official because the staff member may know more and be the person who will actually develop the official's position.
- ❑ Sometimes you will meet with a staff member who is quite unimportant, but it's a beginning. It takes time to cultivate relationships with elected officials and their leading staff members.

### **Written Material**

- ❑ It can be very helpful when you are working with public officials and their staffs to prepare written background information and drafts of desired changes in laws and regulations.

### **Mail, E-Mail, and Phone Campaigns**

- ❑ Letters in large quantities have a significant impact on public officials.
- ❑ Some advocates believe that only personal letters have an impact. It's hard to get people to write personal letters. Since volume counts, I favor form letters or postcards as well as personal letters.
- ❑ Generally letters to public officials should be no more than one page. The first sentence should tell the public official what to do. For example "Please vote for S. 1234, a bill that would provide more housing for people who are homeless."
- ❑ You can also fax the letter or send it by E-mail. I believe that a piece of paper received at the official's office has more impact than E-mail.
- ❑ Or you can telephone the official's office and leave a message such as "I am calling to ask the Senator to vote for S. 1234, which would provide more housing for people who are homeless."
- ❑ Mail and phone campaigns require a great deal of organization—including compilation of a mailing list of people who will write or call, compilation of a mailing list of people to be lobbied, writing sample letters or scripts of telephone messages, communication with your fellow "lobbyists", etc.

## **Lobby Days**

- ❑ A popular form of lobbying is a “lobby day”—i.e. a day of events at the city where the legislature meets.
- ❑ A lobby day generally includes a large assemblage of all the people who have come to lobby. Legislators and other relevant public officials are invited.
- ❑ At some events of this kind, representatives of the advocacy group give short speeches, hoping to capture the attention of public officials who attend. At others, public officials speak to the advocates on topics which the advocacy group has asked them to address.
- ❑ Public officials tend to wander in and out of these events. For this reason, I believe that it is more effective to ask the public officials to speak than to lecture at them.
- ❑ A major purpose of a legislative event is to make an impression, especially to convey a sense of numbers.
- ❑ It also may be an opportunity to reach the press.
- ❑ One form of lobby day includes a legislative meal such as a legislative breakfast, luncheon, or cocktail party.
- ❑ A legislative meal creates an opportunity for advocates to talk informally with public officials as well as for formal presentations of the advocacy group's agenda.
- ❑ Lobby days require tremendous organization and are expensive. You need to have a list of organizers who will bring groups to lobby, have a method of communicating with them rapidly, prepare materials including a handout for legislators, schedule (and confirm and reschedule) meetings, arrange for transportation, reserve a meeting room, arrange for refreshments, schedule speakers, etc.

## **Giving awards and recognition**

- ❑ Another effective device in wooing support from public officials is giving them awards and recognition, usually a plaque or some sort of symbolic sculpture similar to an Oscar.

## **Use of the Internet**

- ❑ E-mail has made it relatively easy to communicate with people who may join you in advocacy by writing letters, making phone calls, or attending lobby days or demonstrations.
- ❑ You can post “action alerts” on a web site, and/or you can create a group E-mail list and notify people when action is needed.
- ❑ Some E-mail systems are constructed so as to permit people to send a communication directly. Others require people to cut and paste letters. There is dispute about the effectiveness of E-mailed advocacy communications. I favor asking people via E-mail to send advocacy letters via snail mail.

## **Testifying at Hearings**

- ❑ From time to time public officials convene public hearings.
- ❑ There are several purposes to hearings--to hear from experts; to gather the public's opinions, whether expert or not; to publicize an issue of concern; and to get media attention.
- ❑ A public hearing is quite formal. To speak, you need to call in advance to schedule your testimony, which will be time-limited.
- ❑ Prepare written testimony which you can read in the time that you've been given. It takes two minutes to read one page effectively.
- ❑ Say what you have to say briefly, clearly, and forcefully but not with disrespectful anger.

## **Campaign Contributions**

- ❑ Elected officials value contributions to their campaign, both tangible and intangible.
- ❑ It is illegal for tax-exempt not-for-profit organizations to make political contributions or even to support candidates for office. For-profit organizations and not-for-profit political organizations, which are not tax exempt, are permitted to make contributions and to provide public support.
- ❑ Advocates from tax-exempt, non-profit organizations can give support personally. Financial contributions must be from your personal funds and cannot be reimbursed as business expenses or claimed as tax deductions. Work that you do on behalf of a candidate must be on your own time, not on time that is paid for by a tax-exempt organization. You can attend fundraising events, but on personal time and not as a representative of your organization. Any public statement of support must be clearly on your own behalf and not on behalf of your organization.
- ❑ There are, of course, ways for organizations to be helpful to political candidates without violating the law. Inviting them to speak at conferences gives them exposure. Putting their pictures in your newsletter or writing an article that features actions they have taken on behalf of your cause can be helpful to a candidate and are legitimate--up to a point.

## **Using professional lobbyists**

- ❑ Many organizations that lobby on social policy use professional lobbyists, which enables them to have a regular presence with elected officials during the legislative session and saves a great deal of time which otherwise would have to be devoted to building relationships.

## **TECHNIQUES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION**

- ❑ Public education is any effort to influence public policy decisions by shaping public opinion or by reaching public officials indirectly.
- ❑ The goal of public education is to swing public opinion to support your advocacy goals and to develop a cadre of supporters committed to your cause, i.e. to build a constituency.

### **Analytic reports and publications**

- ❑ Studies and analytic reports that document problems that need to be addressed by government can be very effective in shaping public opinion.
- ❑ The reports have to be credible and based on professional research and/or expert opinion.
- ❑ In addition reports have to be readable. They require professional quality writing.
- ❑ The report should begin with an Executive Summary, which is brief but contains all the critical points a policy maker needs to know.
- ❑ Reports must have wide distribution and substantial publicity.
- ❑ There must be a follow-up plan to press for the recommendations included in the report.

### **Conferences**

- ❑ Another technique of public education is holding a conference to which critical audiences are invited and which hopefully attracts press attention.
- ❑ Even conferences designed to educate professionals and others in the mental health community can serve an effective advocacy function.
- ❑ In addition to changing public opinion, conferences can be very useful devices to build coalitions of advocates.
- ❑ Conferences can also be very effective ways to engage public officials who attend or participate.

### **Written Material and Internet Web Sites**

- ❑ People in the general public who have an interest in social issues frequently have little access to information. Advocacy organizations typically develop and distribute printed material.

- ❑ The Internet has created a wonderful new opportunity to make materials available. Virtually all advocacy organizations now have web sites, which include all the material they distribute in printed form as well as material which is only available on the site.

## **Advertising**

- ❑ Advertising can be a very effective way to reach both the general public and public officials.
- ❑ Ads in newspapers, on radio, and on TV can have a major impact, but of course are very expensive.
- ❑ It is sometimes possible to get free help to develop and to place advertising, but free advertising usually ends up being run where or when no one is likely to see it.

<h2><b><u>Using the Media</u></b></h2>
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- ❑ The news media can be a great force in helping to move your agenda.
- ❑ The media are a two-edged sword, to be treated with great caution. Historically the media have helped to move many social causes primarily with exposés such as environmental disasters or horrors in institutions. But historically the media have also hurt social causes with lurid coverage of corruption by public officials or abuse of entitlements by people who pretend to be in need or rare episodes of violence by people with mental illnesses, all of which have reinforced negative stereotypes that pervade our society.
- ❑ The media are motivated by factors which are not as simple as concern about the well-being of people. They need to sell papers or get TV viewers and they are more likely to try to catch people's interests with fear than human interest. Their professional values stress political neutrality. However, journalists often tell stories with a political slant; and, of course, they also write editorials to support one political view or another. This makes it hard to get journalists to be advocates for your views.
- ❑ There are several basic ways to get coverage:
  - ❑ Send out a press release, a short informational piece designed to attract media interest.
  - ❑ Call a press conference.
    - ❑ Send invitations and **interesting** written material out in advance.
  - ❑ Develop a story and find a reporter who will write it, but remember
    - ❑ An advocate's idea of a good story is frequently not a reporter's idea of a good story.
    - ❑ Reporters like controversy, scandals, and stories of abuse. They love exposés.

- ❑ On occasion reporters will pursue human-interest stories, more often those that are sad rather than those that show success.
- ❑ Stage a media event. Demonstrations with large crowds generally attract attention. Acts of civil disobedience sometimes attract attention. Celebrities attract attention.
- ❑ Be prominently involved in an event which will attract press coverage. For example, speaking at public hearings can attract coverage. You need to be provocative to get coverage.
- ❑ New York City, Washington, and other major media outlets are very tough places to get coverage because there are so many competing stories. In other places it is frequently easier to get media attention.
- ❑ Getting coverage where important elected officials come from can be very effective.
- ❑ **Bottom line, dealing with the press is about crafting "soundbites", brief statements which take no more than ten seconds to say and which either are provocative or which seem to sum up a position perfectly.**

#### Dealing with reporters

- ❑ Getting your message out through reporters requires experience and skill.
- ❑ The reporter's job is not to convey your beliefs in the way you would want them conveyed. Their job is to tell a story that will catch the interest of their readers, listeners, or viewers. It is usually pointless to try to persuade a reporter to take your side. The reporter will probably be more interested in trying to get you to state your position in a provocative way so as to contrast it with someone else's equally provocative statement of the opposite point of view.
- ❑ Your job is to say over and over again to the reporter what you want to have appear in their story. Do not answer their questions if they do not enable you to say what you want to say.
- ❑ You need to be very careful talking with reporters "on the record", but good reporters are trustworthy if you ask to talk "off the record" or give them "background." "Off the record" means that nothing you say will be quoted. Reporters are willing to go off the record because they can get leads that they could not get on the record. Reporters also like to get background information from knowledgeable people whom they trust even though they cannot quote it.

#### Letters to the Editor and OP-ED Essays

- ❑ One great opportunity newspapers provide is to express your opinion publicly and unfiltered by a reporter in a letter to the editor or an OP-ED essay.
  - ❑ A letter to the editor sometimes is a response to something that has appeared in the newspaper, but sometimes it is simply a statement someone wants to make.

- ❑ Elected officials all read letters to the editor. It is an excellent way to reach them.
- ❑ A letter to the editor should be no more than 150-250 words. (Different papers have different requirements). It should be very easy to understand.
- ❑ An OP-ED piece is a short essay (about 750 words) that states your opinion about a timely or interesting topic.
- ❑ Like letters to the editor, OP-ED essays are an excellent way to get the attention of elected officials. They also make good handouts and mailings. The fact that they have been published by a reputable newspaper lends a certain credibility to them that you can't get by sending out a statement on your own stationary.

## **DEMONSTRATIONS**

- ❑ The purpose of a demonstration is to attract attention and sympathy to your cause. It does no good to get attention which turns the public against your cause. You need the public's support.
- ❑ A good demonstration has four key characteristics.
  - ❑ First, people must attend. There is nothing sadder and more counter-productive than announcing a demonstration of thousands which is attended by fifty people. Therefore a major part of the effort to hold a demonstration is getting people there. Logistics are as important as your message.
  - ❑ Second, the news media have to attend. A demonstration has no meaning without coverage. That means that groundwork has to be done to get reporters interested in covering the event.
  - ❑ Third, you need to craft a message that appeals to a constituency whose support you need to move your agenda.
  - ❑ Fourth, your message must be communicated clearly, repeatedly, and briefly. The soundbite is the message.

## **COURT ACTION**

- ❑ Court action can be a very effective way to bring about major changes in public policy.
- ❑ However, courts can only make rulings on statutory or Constitutional grounds. Thus it can play only a limited role in making new policy.

- ❑ Actions to change public policy can be brought through single cases that will result in precedent setting interpretations of law or in rulings about Constitutionality.
- ❑ Class action suits can also bring about rulings which effective large classes of individuals with common problems.
- ❑ Sometimes court actions result in binding settlement agreements.
- ❑ Obviously court action requires legal consultation and legal leadership.
- ❑ There are many social advocacy organizations that provide consultation and leadership, such as the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, The Bazelon Center for Mental Health, and many, many others.

### SOCIAL DEFIANCE

- ❑ Defiance of normal social order can sometimes be a very effective form of advocacy.
- ❑ For example, economic boycotts were used very effectively to advance civil rights.
- ❑ Similarly, strikes have been effective both to help workers and to highlight injustices.
- ❑ Acts of civil disobedience can also be effective, both at gaining attention from the media and at winning public support.
- ❑ However, all acts of defiance are risky, both personally and in terms of public response.
  - ❑ You must decide if you are prepared to be gassed, arrested, or sent to jail.
  - ❑ You must assess carefully whether your act of social defiance will win or lose support.

### ADVOCACY STYLE

- ❑ **How to present yourself** is a major decision you need to make as an advocate. Do you want to appear to be tough, principled, and uncompromising, prepared to fight it out? Do you want to be friendly and willing to work together to find a solution that will satisfy most of the players? Do you want to come across as extremely knowledgeable and able to provide expert assistance? Do you want to be “at the table” where decisions are made so that you can influence decisions directly? Do you prefer to be outside the decision-making process so that you can stick to your guns?
- ❑ Whether **to work in coalitions** is also a very important choice. Coalitions are usually more effective than advocating alone because there is strength in numbers, but being part of a coalition requires compromise.

- ❑ **Your choice will depend primarily on who you are.** If you are confrontational by nature, you will probably work well as an outspoken, critical, demanding advocate. If you are uncomfortable with confrontation, you will probably work best as an advocate who helps to shape compromises. If you have credibility as an expert, you may want to present yourself as a source of information and counsel rather than as an advocate with a strong personal opinion. If you are not usually willing to make compromises, you should not join coalitions.
- ❑ Your choice will also depend on your relationships with people in positions of power or influence. If you have good working relationships, you will probably decide to be careful not to jeopardize those relationships by taking harsh positions in public.
- ❑ However, **you must be able to adapt your fundamental style for the needs of the moment.** Even a good confrontational advocate must graciously accept a good compromise. And even a congenial, let's-not-fight advocate needs to stick stubbornly to his or her position when a compromise would interfere with achieving the goal. And sometimes you have to take the risk of losing good relationships because the issue is too important and the compromise offered is inadequate.

# **TACTICS CHECKLIST**

## **Lobbying**

Mail  
Petitions  
Meetings  
Relationships  
Hearing Testimony  
Written Material  
Special Events  
Awards  
Campaign Contributions

## **Public Education**

Reports  
Conferences  
Written Material  
Web Page  
Advertising  
Media

## **Demonstrations**

Attendance  
Press Coverage

## **Court Action**

Bringing Class Actions  
Setting Precedents  
Testing Constitutionality

## **Social Defiance**

Boycotts, Strikes, Etc.  
Civil Disobedience  
Risk Assessment

## **Advocacy Style**

Confront Aggressively  
Negotiate  
Provide Expert Advice  
Be “At the Table”  
Work in Coalitions

## **SECTION VI: PERSISTENCE**

### **THE KEY TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY**

- ❑ Advocacy for changes in public policy is inherently frustrating. Changes usually take place slowly. Occasionally there are dramatic successes, but usually you win some and lose some. Sometimes it seems that you are not getting anyplace.
- ❑ It is critical to be persistent despite feeling frustrated.
- ❑ Remember that social policy has improved a great deal since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- ❑ Think about the quality of life for working people and their families in the early 1900's. Workplaces were dangerous; there was not sick leave or vacation; there were no pensions; joining a union could mean risking your life. Health care was abysmal; life expectancy was exceedingly short; families were routinely wiped out by epidemics. Environmental conditions in industrial settings were dreadful; the stench of air pollution was the norm; water was often undrinkable; sewers generally did not exist and garbage collection was erratic at best. Food and drugs were frequently dangerous; inspections of food processing and preparation facilities were unheard of; there were no clinical trials. Jim Crow was the culture of the South and often the North as well; lynchings of uppity blacks were a regular occurrence; health care of blacks was virtually non-existent; education was separate and wildly unequal.
- ❑ The social transformation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the workplace, in the creation of a social security system, in the passage of civil rights acts, in the development of rights and services for people with disabilities, and more—all reflect the influence of social advocacy.
- ❑ Some advocates for social change believe that major changes only take place when there are major social disruptions and threats to social cohesion, such as the Depression.
- ❑ Such social conditions clearly contribute to social change, but not without effective social advocates pointing out the directions that must be pursued to preserve society and enhance social justice.
- ❑ Take a specific example. I originally became a mental health advocate in 1978, when I was working in a rehabilitation program for people who had been in psychiatric hospitals for long periods of time. They generally lived in shabby and dangerous places. There were virtually no community residences or supported housing programs. Few people had access to high quality mental health treatment. Most went to State aftercare clinics, which had poor psychiatric staff and outrageously high caseloads. There were only a handful of community-based rehabilitation programs. When people were in crisis, usually they were either hospitalized in poor hospitals for excessively long periods or they were turned away without the services they needed. Many State hospitals at that time were dangerous. People with mental illnesses also had very limited access to health care. They generally did not have enough money to get through a month with enough to eat. Frequently they had only worn

out, dirty clothing to wear. Often they had nothing better to do during the day than to wander the streets or to sit on park benches.

- ❑ In order to change these conditions, many people fought for specialized housing and community-based treatment and supports.
- ❑ Advocacy worked. In 1978, NYS introduced the community residence program and the community support system program. Now there are about 25,000 housing units in New York State. And there has been great growth of rehabilitation programs, outpatient services, local hospital programs, crisis services, and peer support programs. In addition the quality of care in state hospital in-patient and outpatient programs is vastly improved. The mental health system is far better today than it was twenty-five years ago.
- ❑ This success reflects the work of coalitions of providers, of family members, and of recipients of services, all of whom consistently spoke to the need for more and better community services.
- ❑ Obviously much more needs to be done to create a comprehensive and responsive mental health system. And each year that passes without great improvement creates a sense of disappointment and frustration.
- ❑ Similarly much more needs to be done to advance social justice in America.
- ❑ But, over time, persistent and aggressive advocacy in coalitions works.
- ❑ You have a critical role to play. Your experiences, insights, and hard work are vital to effective social advocacy in the future.

**JOIN, SPEAK OUT, AND HANG IN!**

**BASIC RULES OF ADVOCACY**

**Work in Groups**

**Plan Carefully**

**Take Action**

**Build Relationships**

**Be Persistent**