



Systems Advocacy: What It Is and How to Do It

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Advocacy is:

- The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea or policy.
- Finding your voice: From the Latin *ad* (to) and *vocare* (to call, to vocalize for, or to give evidence).



Three kinds of advocacy:

- Self-advocacy
- Individual advocacy
- Systems advocacy



Similar tactics for all three:

- Decide what you want.
- Get the facts.
- Plan your strategy.
- Gather your support.
- Be firm and persistent.
- Maintain your credibility.



Systems advocacy is:

- Attempting to change government, organization or agency:
 - Policies
 - Rules
 - Laws



Grassroots organizing brings people together

- Society only recognizes the rights of people when they stand up and speak in one voice.
- Organize to gather people together and help them raise that voice.



Grassroots organizing:

- Helps people take power.
- Is continuous.
- Is an investment.
- Alters the relations of power.



Find others who . . .

- . . . are experiencing the same problem you are.
- . . . agree on the nature of the problem.
- . . . are committed to an effort to change the situation.
- The group does not need to be large – at least at the beginning.
 - A small core group can involve others later.



To keep members involved:

- Make it easy for people to get involved.
- Create a sense of purpose.
- Define clear and specific goals:
 - . . . that are achievable in a reasonable time period.
 - . . . whose achievement will improve people's lives.



Effective online networking:

- Gather e-mail addresses.
- Establish broadcast e-mail lists:
 - Send action alerts.
 - Inform your membership.
- Establish discussion lists.
- Create a Web site.



Prioritize goals:

- Start with the goal that has the greatest potential for achievement:
 - Success will bind the group.
 - Success will create motivation for continued efforts.
 - Stick with it: Never give up.



Gather information:

- Who has authority to make needed changes?
- What laws, rules and policies are in place that affect the situation?
- What rights and complaint procedures exist?
- What facts support the need for change?



How are changes made?

- Who has power?
- How would those in power benefit by the change?
- Create positive incentives that make the change attractive to those in power.



Knowledge Is Power

- Learn as much as you can about the government/non-government organization or agency you are trying to change.
- Attend meetings, public hearings and conferences.
- Acquaint yourself with staff.



Create an advocacy plan

- Determine your goal.
- Frame your goal in positive terms.
- Research what it will take to achieve your goal.



Be ready to negotiate

- Study the offer.
- Don't accept an initially offered solution too quickly.
 - It may be designed to appease rather than create real change.
- Be ready to suggest an alternative.
- Consider accepting the offer on a trial basis:
 - Establish criteria to assess success.
 - Establish a time frame for reviewing outcomes.



Strategy development (1)

- What do you want?
 - Long-term goals? Short-term goals?
 - Content goals (e.g., policy change)?
 - Process goals (building community among participants)?



Strategy Development (2)

- Who can give it to you?
 - Those with formal authority (legislators)
 - Those who can influence the policymakers:
 - Key aides
 - The media
 - Key constituencies



Strategy development (3)

- What do they need to hear?
 - Tailor message to audience.
 - Put a “human face” on the issue.
 - Two components:
 - Appeal to what is right.
 - Appeal to audience’s self-interest.



Strategy development (4)

- Who do they need to hear it from?
 - Experts
 - “Authentic voices”
- How can we get them to hear it?
 - Phone calls
 - Letters
 - Meetings
 - Letters to the editor and op-eds
 - Direct action



Strategy development (5)

■ What are our resources?

- Related past advocacy work
- Existing alliances
- Staff and volunteers
- Media
- Information and acumen

■ What are the gaps? Perhaps:

- Alliances that have yet to be developed
- Media
- Research



Strategy development (6)

- How do we begin?
 - Develop achievable goals to build constituency.
 - Lay groundwork.
- How can we tell if it's working?
 - Evaluate what we've done.
 - Make mid-course strategy corrections.



Increase your group's visibility

- Join forces with like-minded organizations in a coalition effort.
- Use the Internet.
- Use the media.



Do be:

■ Prepared

■ Brief and
concise

■ Clear

■ Honest

■ Accurate

■ Polite

■ Persuasive

■ Timely

■ Persistent

■ Grateful



Say “thank you” before “please.”

- Create an “affirmation sandwich”:
 - Begin with praise, even if it’s only for agreeing to a meeting or accepting a phone call.
 - Continue with expressing your goals.
 - End with thanks.



Don't:

- Don't be argumentative.
- Don't be demanding.
- Don't bluff.
- Don't promise rewards.
- Don't knock the opposition.



Before making the first call:

- Write down a description of your problem or need:
 - Include only the most important facts and details.
- Gather background information:
 - Include the rationale for your request.
 - Know the counter-arguments so you can respond.
- Target your efforts:
 - Identify the right agency and person to talk to.



Making the call:

- Give the following information:
 - Your name, address, contact info
 - The issue that prompted your call
 - What action you are asking for



More about phone calls:

- Write down:

- Name of person you spoke to

- Date and time of call

- Express yourself clearly.

- Assert yourself calmly.

- Follow up:

- Call back once or twice a week until you have achieved the desired action or set up a meeting to discuss your goals further.



Writing letters (1)

- A very effective way to express your opinion.
- Identify the issue clearly.
- State your position and why you care.
- State how the issue will affect you and/or others.
- Tell the decision-maker what you would like him or her to do.



Writing letters (2)

- KISS (Keep It Short and Simple)
- Type letter on letterhead.
- Send copies to other advocates, legislators, or others you want to inform. (Put “cc:” with the list of these people at the bottom.)
- Keep a copy for your records.
- Follow up with phone calls or another letter.



Face-to-Face Meetings (1)

- Be organized:
 - Practice what you plan to say.
- Bring others with you if that would help:
 - Make sure everyone in the group is prepared.
- Dress neatly.
- Be on time.



Face-to-Face Meetings (2)

- Look the person in the eye.
- Shake hands firmly.
- Call the person by name.
- Use positive body language.



Face-to-Face Meetings (3)

- Prepare anecdotes to illustrate your points.
- Rehearse: If you are going as a group, agree in advance on each person's role and the order in which they will speak.
- If you are part of a coalition, make sure everyone agrees on the message and what you would like the person you are meeting with to do.



Face-to-Face Meetings (4)

- State your message clearly and simply.
- Don't be argumentative; be reasonable.
- Politely answer questions and concerns.
- If you disagree, make your point and move on.



Face-to-Face Meetings (5)

- If you don't know the answer to a question:
 - Say so, and promise to find out the answer.
 - Get back with the answer in a reasonable time period.



Face-to-Face Meetings (6)

- Don't do all the talking.
 - Give the policy maker time to ask questions or express his or her opinions.
 - Listen to what the other person is saying.
 - If you don't understand something, ask questions to clarify.



Face-to-Face Meetings (7)

- Avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Ask for the policymaker's support.
- Thank the policymaker for their support, or at least for their time.
- Follow up with a note thanking the policymaker and summarizing the main points of the meeting.



Face-to-Face Meetings (8)

- Bring a packet to leave behind:
 - Fact sheets
 - Newspaper clippings
 - Your contact information



If you are unsatisfied:

- Ask why the person can't help you.
- Ask for another person or agency who might be able to help you.
- Remain calm and respectful.



Continue relationships by:

- Keeping in touch, especially with key staff.
- Involving policy makers in celebrating your accomplishments.
- Inviting policy makers to public forums.
- Helping policy makers get credit when it's due.



Systems advocacy involves the art of compromise:

- You may not achieve everything you want, but you can achieve some of what you want and use that to build on.



Self-advocacy: A good start

- Clearinghouse taught self-advocacy skills to Thresholds members in Chicago.
- Annette Williams, a Recovery Specialist at Thresholds in Chicago, will talk about what she learned.



Annette Williams:

Using self-advocacy skills in everyday life makes recovery work even better.



I learned better communication:

- I learned that I have the right to speak up for myself.



In my family:

- My mother used to say anything she wanted to me.
 - I began to speak up for myself and told my mother that she shouldn't treat me like a child anymore.
- My son used to make me feel guilty about not babysitting more often.
 - I spoke up about seeing my grandchildren when I can, rather than whenever he wants me to.



With the system:

- I had to spend \$486 a month before insurance would cover my medication.
- I advocated for myself:
 - I talked with case manager: No help.
 - I talked with psychiatrist: He told me about Wal-Mart prescription program for \$4 each.
 - Didn't cover psych meds.
 - Found free psych meds program on Internet.



Apply your self-advocacy skills daily:

- Self-advocacy:
 - Helps you regain power.
 - Puts you on the path to recovery.
- If you believe you have power:
 - Your positive self-image will let others know they need to respect you.



On the job, for example:

- Speak to your supervisor about problems.
- If you don't, this can stress you out and lead to:
 - Depression
 - Anger
 - You might burst out at the wrong time.



To help you self-advocate:

- Affirmation will help you build hope and faith in yourself.
- Every day, say two or three affirmations to yourself in the mirror.
 - You will start loving and believing in yourself.
 - You will start to speak up for yourself.
 - People will notice you and respect you.



Speaking up for yourself:

- Can make good things happen for yourself.
- First learn to advocate for yourself; then you can advocate to change the system.

To conclude the Webinar, I'd like to turn it back over to Joseph Rogers.



Two “last words”:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

--Margaret Mead (1901-1978)

“One person can make a difference, and every person must try.”

– President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963)

. . . Please see resources, bibliography, and presenters’ contact information on the following slides.



Resources:

- Google:
 - 72,000 Web sites for “Advocacy tips” in a tenth of a second
 - Not all of the sites will be useful, but many will. (See slides 54-60 for some useful sites.)
- National Mental Health Consumers’ Self-Help Clearinghouse (215-553-4539)
- Public library



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