



# Legislative Advocacy



# Deciding on Legislative Advocacy

- Can you accomplish your goals through executive action? (only one target=shorter path to victory)
- Is the problem shared by the entire (or most of) locality, state, or nation? (asking a legislative body to address a very localized concern=exercise in frustration)
- Do you have (or can you mobilize) sufficient power to influence the legislative process?



# Building Leadership through Legislative Advocacy

- Not all legislative advocacy strategies build power for constituents and organizations
  - “Vote trading”
  - Power-brokering/Arm twisting
  - Vote ‘buying’ (with candidate contributions, etc...)
- For maximum impact, constituent leaders/clients should play key roles in:
  - Charting legislative strategy
  - Assessing legislators’ leanings and doing individual visits/pressuring legislators
  - Conducting research and developing advocacy materials
  - Crafting and delivering testimony
  - Engaging the media



# Developing Proposals

- Policy proposals should include the following components:
  - Articulation of the problem (how much, how do you know, why is it bad?)
  - Connection to self-interest (of the policymakers, their constituents, the unit of government)
  - Statement of proposed solution (why is it the best, what else did you consider?)
  - Estimation of costs (or preparation to produce these) and implementation considerations



# Developing Proposals, cont.

- Questions to consider in developing proposals:
  - Do we want to aim for our ideal and settle on a fallback position, or ask for only what we think we can get?
  - Should legislators be involved in developing the proposal, or do we want to deliver it developed?
  - What role should allies play in shaping proposal specifics?
  - Beyond your core leaders, what input will other constituents have, and how will you control messages about the proposal?
  - What's our 'bottom line' for negotiations?



# Policy Research

- Where to find the policy research you need:
  - thomas.loc.gov (for Congress)
  - www.kslegislature.org
  - Federal and state agencies for implementation reports
  - Think tanks and quasi-governmental groups have best practices analyses and bill tracking
  - Media coverage for bill passage information, legislative history ([www.cjonline.com](http://www.cjonline.com); [www.ljworld.com](http://www.ljworld.com))
  - Committee secretaries=your best friends
- Translating your research into action:
  - Policy briefs
  - Briefing presentations
  - Talking points (not usually to share with policymakers)
  - Proposals (more fleshed-out briefs)
  - Testimony (persuasion more than information)



# Building Coalitions

- Winning legislative approval for your policies beyond the local level almost always requires collaboration with other organizations/interests
- To identify likely allies:
  - Contact partners with whom you have worked on other initiatives to discuss your proposal
  - Look for media accounts of other organizations concerned about the social problem
  - Contact those whose issues you have supported (quid pro quo)
  - Work with friendly legislators to identify contacts in their districts
  - Ask each coalition partner to identify at least 2 new allied organizations
  - Hold public events in different communities and use media to attract allies (letters to the editor, public event announcements, paid advertising)
  - Use petitions, postcards, and other grassroots strategies to demonstrate support (especially if have few organizations)
  - Identify your opponents and *their* opponents (may be your friends)



# Working with Legislative Advocacy Coalitions

- Issues to be managed:
  - Logistics of communication and information flow
  - Possibilities of conflicts of interest (with policymakers, other proposals)
  - Chain of decision-making (especially in negotiations)
  - “Credit” for victories
  - Message, message, message!
  - Process
    - What means are off the table? Who will have what roles?



# Influencing Policymakers

- **RELATIONSHIPS!**

- Appeal to interests

- Requires getting to know what they care about, getting affected individuals in front of them, and meeting in person whenever possible

- Present accurate, compelling information

- In accessible format, that makes them look informed

- Make an electoral case

- How it will affect them in direct votes or overall electability

- Use media and public pressure

- Minimize controversy by controlling the debate



# What Doesn't Work

- Emails or other mass communication from those outside of their districts
- Threats related to their elections
- Solely emotional appeals (or solely intellectual ones)—will only firm up your existing support
- Relying on allies to carry your message for you (especially paid lobbyists, who have connections but not your passion)
- Using the exact same message/strategy for all policymakers
- Ignoring the staff to focus only on lawmakers



# Using the Media

- Editorials
  - Meetings with editorial boards, prepare materials specific to their communities, have a hook
- Letters to the editor
  - Draft letters to be submitted by allies
- Earned media
  - Press advisories, relationships with reporters who cover statehouse/Congress/local government, organization of events to generate coverage, prepare multiple responses as contingencies for votes/actions
- Paid advertising (only buy what you can't get otherwise)
- Collecting information from reporters
- Sharing media coverage with policymakers
  - In packets, for visits, with staff



# Working through the Process

- How will you negotiate as the process moves, particularly when things move quickly and you have to be accountable to a large constituency?
- Who will be responsible for tracking (must be done multiple times a day during peaks)?
- Who has authority to negotiate and make decisions?
- What role will your legislative sponsors play?
- How will you connect this legislative advocacy to your larger strategy for change?
- What resources do you/other partners bring to the process?



# Ensuring Implementation

- Develop your proposal with an eye towards successful implementation
- Get buy-in of your legislative sponsors to support your implementation efforts
- Plan for implementation monitoring as a part of your legislative work
- Stay connected with your media contacts so that you'll have coverage if there's a need for pressure around implementation
- Organize activities to ensure that your constituency continues to take the lead:
  - Meetings with executive agencies and your leaders
  - Coalition public comments
  - Accountability actions if meeting resistance



# Considerations of Diversity

- Logistics

- Transportation, childcare, paid time off work

- Access

- Language, dress, protocol, security measures

- Power differentials (especially in coalitions)

- Pay attention to spokespeople, different views of the issue, minority representation

- Style/culture

- Comfort confronting authority, experience with negotiation, divulging to media



# Questions/Discussion?

- Reading Discussion Questions
- Experiences with legislative advocacy
- Strategies for implementing legislative advocacy into your work
  - Brainstorm 2-4 legislative priorities for your organization (at any level of government)
  - For each issue, list 3 facts you'll need to know, 3 allies who would be helpful, and 3 potential proposals for change
- Questions about the day in Topeka