

Developing A Policy Initiative

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This form was inspired by materials from the Midwest Academy, Doris Marshall Institute, The Marin Institute, and Berkley Media Studies Group.

It's not enough to simply react to issues with demands and counter demands. At some point, if we are serious about building community power, we must shape and initiate public policy. Below are basic steps in shaping proactive, community-generated policies. Of course, this worksheet is not a recipe but a guide from which to begin your strategy.

1. Clearly Define The Problem

This requires gathering as many reports, surveys, personal observations and other resources that accurately describe the problem you wish to address. It is difficult to effectively address problems in the environment with simply an intuitive, "we see a number of youths without much to do." Know, among other things, the number of youth arrests, injuries and other incidents; what options (if any) do they have; what young people actually think about the situation; local funding issues; and the impact of corporate institutions. Another reason to have detailed information to substantiate your policy recommendation is that all legislation must be based on a finding or set of facts that provide the rationale for enacting the law. If you are interested in seeing your policy recommendations codified, then you must be prepared with the facts. Above all, be able to describe the problem clearly in ways that help your community grasp the seriousness of the problem – and hold the right players accountable.

2. Develop Policy Goals

All policy must be developed within the framework of your organization's purpose and long range goals. It's important to compare your organization's goals with the goal for your issue. In your assessment you should ask yourself: what constitutes victory? How will this policy address the problem/have an impact on the quality of life of your constituents/members and/or community?

Take time to assess each of the objectives you must achieve to meet your campaign goal. Examples of short-term objectives are the support of local politicians, other gatekeepers, or regulatory agencies before winning changes in local or state institutional policy. This assessment requires developing a scrupulous list of all the steps necessary to accomplish each short term objective.

3. Assess Your Ability To Undertake A Campaign To Implement These Goals

Another important consideration is your organizational health and survival. Can you win? Or perhaps more importantly, can your organization afford to lose? Advocacy campaigns can strengthen organizations by building a sense of team spirit, expanding the leadership base, deepening the leadership's level of experience and expanding an organization's membership and contact base. Of course, your organization must bring something to the campaign in the first place (i.e., membership, staff, money, reputation, facilities, press contacts, allies, etc.). Make a careful assessment of your assets as well as any liabilities you bring to the effort.

4. Assess Community Resources

As stated above, the best kind of campaigns build a sense of community and build community power. Building broad, cohesive coalitions is critical to these efforts. One way to think about coalition building is by developing a list of groups and individuals who share the different parts of the problem you'd like to address and what would each party gain from supporting the effort. Of course, these issues are not black and white. Assess each parties depth of support, what they - and you - risk by coming together, what they bring to the effort and how much effort will it take to reach them and maintain their presence in the coalition.

5. Assess Who Has the Power To Enact the Policy

Any discussion on doing advocacy would be incomplete without taking a look at who you may have to target to achieve your goal. Once you've decided what institutions or individuals have power or influence to enact your policy, then you must (through research) determine all the ways you can access and influence the process (personal contacts, media, as voters or taxpayers, freedom of information requests, etc.).

6. Develop An Action Plan

Once you've assessed your organizational and community capacity, your allies and opponents as well as the gatekeepers who have the power to enact your policy, you are ready to develop an action plan for your campaign. The actions you take should be flexible and engage your community. Make sure that your target is clear and that the policy recommendation(s) are: within its/their power; specific; and can be articulated in a way that is easily understood. Set time limits for certain tactics and develop an alternate plan if your original tactics are not yielding results. Also, make sure you include a plan for monitoring your target institutions and the policies once they are implemented. Above all, be tenacious and remember that changing policy means changing minds - and that takes time.

Media Action Planning

Effective use of media is also a critical tool in any advocacy campaign. Media enables public health advocates who gain access to capture public attention on behalf of a particular issue or policy change. Media has often turned the tide by informing the public (and policy makers in particular) of a particular problem; providing ideas and opportunities for public action; and facilitating a shift in the focus from policy that holds individuals accountable to policies that seek to effectively regulate institutional actors as well. Your action plan should also include how you plan to use the media.

7. Evaluate Your Success

Evaluation, if done well, informs your work on an ongoing basis. Your organization should periodically review each step of your action plan to assess if it's working. Some questions to ask yourself:

- Did we do what we said we would do?
- What have we gained (people, resources, exposure - related and not related to your goals)?
- What have we changed (policy, community or press relations, etc.)?
- What still makes sense to continue?
- What isn't working?

Use your evaluation information and make any necessary changes to your action plan. Also, make sure that you just don't focus on your shortcomings. This is hard work. Take time to celebrate your achievements no matter how small they may seem. You deserve it!

Defining the Problem

You have now identified a variety of issues in your community, and policy options to be used in reducing those risks. To begin the process of planning, work with your group to choose an issue that you would like to use the tool of policy change to address. Make sure that the problem is immediate (within your sphere of influence), specific (can you measure it?), and winnable (will taking this on strengthen your organization, as well as increase agency in your community?).

The Problem is (25 words or less):

List as much information that you, as a group, can about the problem:

List five sources outside of your organization for further information:

Developing Policy Goals

Write a brief summary of the purpose and long range goals of your organization.

Using no more than 30 words, state the *policy* goal for this issue:

Name three concrete improvements that would be won by achieving this goal:

How will achieving this goal contribute to building the community's sense of their own power?

What is the relationship between organizational goals and the policy goal?

Name three *non-policy* goals (i.e., expanding membership, etc.) that can be aided by this effort:

Setting Objectives

Brainstorm with your group a "laundry list" of steps necessary to accomplish your goal. Don't take longer than 5 minutes on each part of this step for now. Revisit them after you've gone through the exercises entirely.

What short-term victories must you first win (i.e., support of regulatory agencies, minimum signatures to place issue on the ballot or before council, etc.) to achieve your policy goal?

List steps necessary to accomplish each short-term goal listed above:

Assessing Your Organizational Capacity

Review your policy goal. With that goal in mind, list three specific ways in which your organization needs to be strengthened in order to achieve your goal:

List the resources your organization brings to this campaign (i.e., membership, staff, money, reputation, facilities, press contacts, allies, etc.).

List three internal problems that have to be considered or overcome.

How will the campaign strengthen the organization, if you win?

If you lose?

How can the campaign weaken the organization?

Assessing Your Targets

List who/what institution has/have the power to solve the problem and grant your demands? When possible, list specific names. Identify which is the most important target for achieving your policy goal.

Who must you get to first before those listed above? Be specific:

List strengths and weaknesses of each target:

| Opponent | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|----------|-----------|------------|
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Assessing Your Targets (Continued)

Which targets are appointed? Elected?

How do you have power/influence with them (as voters, consumers, taxpayers, etc.)?

What is the self-interest of each?

Who would have jurisdiction if you redefined the issue (e.g. turned a tobacco advertising issue into a fair business practices issue)? Does this help you?

Assessing Your Opposition

List people and institutions who may oppose you. When possible, list specific names. Identify which are likely to do the most “damage”.

List strengths and weaknesses of each opponent:

| Opponent | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|----------|-----------|------------|
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| | | |
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| | | |

Assessing Your Opponents

Which are appointed? Elected?

How do you have power/influence with them (as voters, consumers, taxpayers, etc.)?

Assessing Community Resources

| List who shares this problem? | What would they get out of joining you? | Who else would they bring in? | Who would their presence alienate? |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
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Rank each group named above from 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest) with regard to your issues taking into account the following factors: self-interest, depth of concern, risk in joining you, and level of difficulty to reach/organize.

| Group | Self-interest | Depth of concern | Risk in joining you | Difficult to reach/organize |
|-------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
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Assessing Community Resources (Continued)

For each group named above, list the specific power they have over your targets:

| Group | Target | Power |
|-------|--------|-------|
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NOTES:

Write here your policy goal:

List three goals for your work with the media. At least one should be related to your policy goal:

Whom do you want to reach? Remember the allies and targets you identified in your policy exercises.

Allies you must reach using media:

Targets you will influence using media:

Distill your policy message into a 15-word (maximum) statement that will get the point across. Remember: a message is not the same as a soundbite. It is the overall theme of your initiative that you are trying to communicate.

What are good images for conveying the message?

Who are good spokespeople for conveying the message?

List arguments of the opposition:

Develop two soundbites that convey your message and address important issues raised by the opposition. (Remember: you are not debating them. You are delivering the message.)

Monitoring and Evaluating Your Campaign

Who will be responsible for monitoring activity?

What activities are necessary to insure the effort is monitored properly?

What will constitute success? (Be specific. Refer back to your goals and objectives)

Developing Your Action Plan

Now you have what you need to develop an action plan. Don't forget give yourself time to review your answers. Be sure to set dates for the completion of each step.

Policy Goal-

Main Target-

Our Opposition-

| What Information We Need | Where to Go For It | By When |
|--------------------------|--------------------|---------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Short Term Objectives/Victories (in chronological order) Be sure to include any tasks concerning your target(s). Attach an extra paper if necessary.

Victories we need to accomplish our policy goal:

Developing Your Action Plan (Continued)

Tasks we need to accomplish to gain each victory:

We want to work in coalition with the following groups/individuals:

Tasks we need to accomplish to make this happen for each listed above:

We have identified the following secondary targets as critical to our goal:

What we want from each target:

Actions we need to undertake to make this happen:

Tasks we need to accomplish for each action

Action #1:

Action #2:

Action #3: