

*It is not
enough to be
compassionate.
You must act.*
-Tenzin Gyatso

Legislative Advocacy Tip Sheet

When advocating for systems change, it is important to focus on a particular issue, or related issues, that need to be addressed. Here are some tips to consider.

Identify the issue

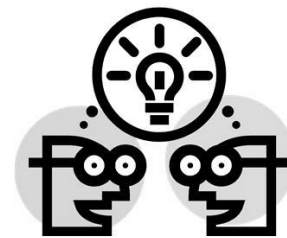
Identify and focus on a particular issue or related issues. What is an attainable solution? For example, “There are not enough home support options for adults with developmental disabilities”, instead of “Parenting a child with special needs is tough.” Although both may be true, the former is more specific and points decision makers to a specific problem that needs to be resolved.

Recognize the importance of timing and be realistic about whether the particular problem can be addressed in the current political climate. An issue that is expensive to resolve will be especially challenging during a climate of economic downturn and budget cuts. Contemplate possible solutions, but be open-minded about different ways to address the problem.

Research

It is important to have a basic understanding of the system that you want to change.

This would include identifying the appropriate government body where the change needs to occur. Is this a law that needs to be changed or a policy within an agency?



Collaborate

Advocacy can be much more effective when working with others who have a similar goal or interest. More people bring in new energy, connections and talent. Listen to what the core members recognize as their strengths, however, encourage people to go beyond their comfort zone if they are willing. Your core group might consist of people who like to write, speak in front of a group, research, or who are great organizers. These skills and more are all equally useful for systems advocacy and will help determine the strategy your group will pursue.



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When collaborating, it is important to be respectful of the views of others who may be impacted by the proposed systems change. Forums, surveys, and face-to-face meetings are a good way to make a connection and share your concerns for pursuing systems change.

Develop a strategy

Meet with your core group of advocates to decide on next steps. Who should meet with stakeholder groups, decision makers and/or the media? Should you go to the public with your issue or work directly with decision makers? It is important that all your members carry the same core message and commit to learning the issues well. If working as part of a coalition, be sure to give group members opportunities to share their views and have equal input into the process.

Communication

Establish systematic communication with other people who are interested in the proposed change. Keeping others engaged in the process creates excitement and keeps people informed. Gather email addresses and create a distribution list to share knowledge and to generate calls of action when needed. Use the list to give people information about the issue so that they can become knowledgeable about the subject. For legislative advocacy, consider keeping a list of senators and representatives. This will make it much easier to send out targeted calls of action when trying to reach a particular region or an individual legislator.

Stakeholders and decision makers

Understand who the stakeholders are and where they stand on your issue. Sometimes their support is not obvious, but they may be working behind the scenes. Some participants may not agree with the proposed changes due to a lack of understanding of your goal or fear that the change will negatively impact them. Be proactive.

Know who the decision makers are for your particular issue and work with your core group to decide the best way to approach them.

In-person meetings

The importance of a face-to-face meeting with others in the advocacy process cannot be emphasized enough. Whether you are meeting with other advocates, stakeholders, or decision makers, make time to have at least a few meetings. When possible, attend related committee meetings in person and consider establishing a schedule to ensure the presence of at least one of your core group members. For legislative advocacy, presence at the State House on a regular basis is essential not only for committee meetings but for spontaneous meetings with legislators. Your group's presence will remind sponsors of the importance of your bill and also provide them with access to a quick answer. The better educated your legislator is about the issue, the better they can advocate for passage of the bill.

Prepare to negotiate

Have an open mind. You may not achieve everything you want but realize that any change is a foundation for more change in the future. Before agreeing to any decision, be sure to consult with your core group members to seek consensus.

Be persistent

It may take months or years for the change you are advocating for to happen, if it happens at all. Don't give up but realize that it takes a lot of persistence to make changes. Involving others is the key to move forward. Maintain your focus and don't lose your patience with other advocates, other stakeholders, or decision makers.

Resources

[State of Vermont Legislature](http://StateofVermontLegislature)
802-828-2228