So You Want to Make A Difference

By
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Special thanks also goes to all of the many advocates across the country whose stories and experience form the heart of what you are about to read.

THE MOLAR MAJORITY

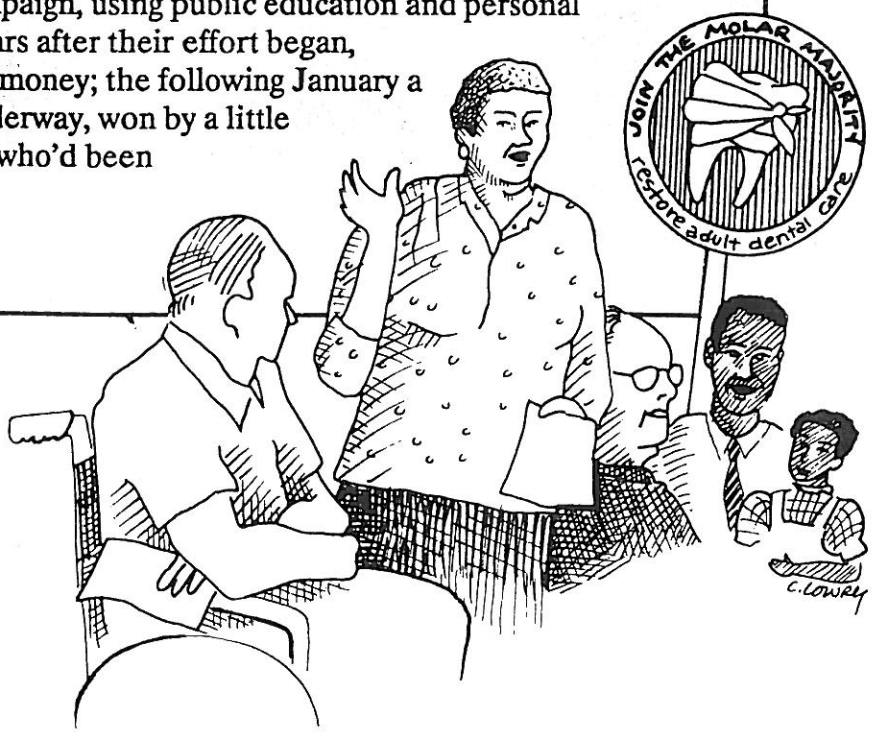
When a small group (one and one-half staff, plus a volunteer board) working on low-income issues in Washington state wanted to learn what their low-income constituents needed from the legislature, they surveyed people in welfare offices, shelters, and food lines. The answer they got was unexpected: dental care. There are emergency rooms for sick bodies, people said, but there are no "emergency rooms for teeth."

The logical answer to the problem was unfortunately also complicated and costly: Medicaid would have to be expanded to cover dental care. And that, all the experts agreed, wasn't likely with budgets so tight. Even so, the advocates felt an obligation to try.

In the Spring they brought the issue to the legislature's attention, and got Medicaid authority expanded to cover dental care. There was only one catch: the legislators didn't vote any money to pay for it. At that point some might have given up, but these advocates chose instead to declare a partial victory. Their effort had just become a two-phase campaign, they said, and they'd just won Phase I.

To launch Phase II – getting the money – they held a victory celebration and announced the formation of...the Molar Majority. One woman came dressed like a tooth, children brushed their teeth in public, and everyone sang the "Anthem of the Molar Majority."

Next they formed a coalition with people from congregations, civic groups, dental professionals, and anyone they could enlist. Throughout the fall and winter they waged their campaign, using public education and personal lobbying. One and a half years after their effort began, the legislators voted for the money; the following January a dental care program got underway, won by a little band of determined people who'd been told it couldn't be done.



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to advocacy. If you have ever spoken up on behalf of someone you cared about, then you have been an advocate. It's that simple.

There is a mystique surrounding advocacy – that you have to be an expert on your issue, or an expert in the way the process works. Not so. It is true that some kinds of advocacy require considerable knowledge and expertise, but advocacy is like anything else: beginners aren't expected to know as much as professionals, and the more you do it the easier it gets.

Even lobbying a legislator can be easy. All you have to do is develop a clear, simple message (a problem to call attention to, some useful personal experience, a proposal that you'd like to see enacted or rejected), and deliver it. That's it. If you can do that, you can be a policy advocate.

This manual is designed to give you some of the details you will need along the way, and ways to find more sophisticated help and information as they are needed.

So You Want to Make a Difference was written with three goals in mind:

- To help citizens feel more confident about getting involved in policy advocacy;
- To equip local leaders with some tools so they can teach others about policy advocacy;
- To stimulate involvement in democratic decision-making and provide information about key resources.

Throughout, the examples provided will show the importance of getting involved, and how ordinary people can make a difference.

Efforts like the "molar majority campaign," for example, are at the heart of what public policy advocacy is all about. The word "advocacy" sometimes conjures up visions of mass demonstrations and public protests, or well-paid lobbyists in expensive suits. But a lot of advocacy is just a matter of seeing a need and finding a way to address it. It means literally "to plead the cause of another" – which most of us do all the time on behalf of our neighbors, our families, our friends. Policy advocacy is the next logical step. It just carries that "pleading" into the political arena, and does it on behalf of people we may not know personally. It is a practical way to translate basic values like respect for human dignity or concern for troubled children into policies and laws.

Everywhere it is possible to find good people eager to get involved in working for healthier communities and a better future, but unsure how to go about it. Everywhere there are people who know they should be more involved, but can't think how to find the time in already busy lives.

Everywhere there are people who, for one reason or another, sit on the sidelines while others suffer—but want to act. They are the people for whom this was written.

Therefore: for everyone who wants to play a part in securing a better future, for all those organizations and groups desiring to extend their effectiveness, and for all those citizens who want public policies to do a better job of responding to human needs... this was written. It is intended to help individuals and groups engage their neighbors, their colleagues, and their organizations on behalf of better social policies.

How To Use This Manual

Since much of the material that follows is information most people know but just haven't thought about lately, in many ways it is like a "refresher course." Much of advocacy is like that. It depends less on material found in books, and more on lessons learned in the process of living: how power is wielded, how people are motivated, and how those with power are influenced. In short, it is about how government works and social change is won.

Throughout, that newly remembered knowledge will be applied to the idea of winning better laws and policies on behalf of vulnerable people in local communities and everywhere.

Think of it as a kind of road map, a guide through:

Policy advocacy

Our system of government

Practical ideas for getting started

Some of the "nuts and bolts" of advocacy, and

Additional benefits advocacy can provide.

Who Should Use This Manual?

Individuals will find many useful ideas in the material that follows. It gives concrete examples; offers useful advice; and provides valuable basic information about how public policies get made.

However working in *groups* makes advocacy easier, more enjoyable, and often more effective. Consequently, most of this material was developed for use by a group. Many of its suggestions assume the formation of a group, and joint activities with other groups.

Either way, the ideas presented are intended to get your imaginations working. Expect to adapt them to your issue or group. And don't think you can't accomplish anything if you don't belong to an advocacy group.

The starting place in your community may be:

- A church group or adult Sunday school class;
- A study committee within a civic organization or social agency board;
- A group of neighbors concerned about a problem (like the volunteers at a neighborhood center or food bank);

or

- A group already formed for another purpose (like the Knights of Columbus, Rotary Club, or Junior League).

Members in the group may be diverse, but all should share a common interest in seeking solutions to the problems faced by people in the community, and a willingness to take action to that end. Unless more people assume responsibility for the problems now plaguing American communities, they will get worse.

But whether as individuals or in groups, this manual is for *people who are unskilled in policy advocacy*. So, each part begins with a

story of a successful advocacy effort, or technique, which you can use in your efforts. There is also a "Civics Review" with information to help walk others—and you as their guide—through the process step by step. (If you are more experienced you may just want to skim the "Civics Review," and it always makes sense to add your own experience to the examples presented throughout.)

In the Appendix you will find some materials ready to copy, for use at meetings or workshops on advocacy.

It is not necessary that your core group be large or experienced. But, once the decision has been made to get involved, the initial steps are clear.

The First Task is to assemble a core group interested in pursuing the basic training needed to move from knowing little and doing less, to knowing more and accomplishing much.

The Second Task is to find and appoint one or more people to assume initial leadership. It helps if that individual lives in the community, is committed to the effort, and already part of your group.

The Third Task is to find a "home" for the activity. That means meeting space and the use of a telephone (e.g. in a church basement or United Way agency), but also support and encouragement. It could be set up as a project of an existing organization, as an entirely new entity, or begun as a project of something else but with a time-table for future independence. Whatever the arrangement, "moral support" will be very important to the undertaking.

And now, it is time to begin.

A QUIZ

Can you imagine yourself doing any of the following?

	YES	NO
Going down to City Hall to complain about a tax bill you think is too high?	☐	☐
Helping when your neighbor gets a confusing letter from Social Security, by making phone calls and dealing with the bureaucracy?	☐	☐
Making a presentation at your church about a community project you care about and know well?	☐	☐
Responding when your child's school says they may change the rules about whether pregnant teens can stay in school and they want to hear from the parents?	☐	☐
Testifying before a state legislative committee as part of a panel, on a subject you know well and care about?	☐	☐

PART I

THINKING ABOUT ADVOCACY

If you answered "yes" to two or more of the questions, then you are an advocate, because each is an example of advocacy.

- The first is "self-advocacy," something we do all the time when we speak up for our selves or our families.
- Second is an example of "case" advocacy, which often involves helping someone deal with a complicated bureaucracy.
- Third is an example of "public (or community) education," which is another form of advocacy.
- Fourth is an example of "administrative" (or regulatory) advocacy, which includes responding in writing when a governmental unit proposes a change in its rules and invites public comment.
- And fifth is an example of "legislative" advocacy, or lobbying. Almost anything done to influence a legislator's vote testifying, speaking, writing a letter falls here.

Many people hesitate to get involved in advocacy because they equate it with activities they aren't comfortable with—like demonstrations on the Courthouse steps or public protest. Those are legitimate advocacy strategies, but they are only part of the story. "Advocacy" covers a range of activities broad enough to include just about everyone, in just about any kind of setting. And most are things we already do for ourselves, our neighbors, our friends. Policy advocacy just carries it into the policy arena.

It helps to keep a few underlying principles in mind.

Advocacy assumes that people have rights, and those rights are enforceable.

Advocacy works best when focused on something specific.

Advocacy is chiefly concerned with rights or benefits to which someone is already entitled.

And policy advocacy in particular is concerned with ensuring that institutions work the way they should.

These last two points are related. You have a right to accurate tax bills; your neighbor has a right to his social security. Speaking up to protect such rights isn't unreasonable.

You wouldn't just pay unfair tax bills or give your neighbor a list of soup kitchens and suggest he adjust to life without social security. Instead, you take action to make

certain that the government systems involved (the tax office, the social security agency) operate according to the law. That's policy advocacy.

Anyone can be a policy advocate who is willing to:

- Speak up;
- Help others get benefits to which they are entitled;
- Challenge government systems when they don't work;
- Work for laws, budgets, and policies that do work; and
- Be a voice for others (especially those with troubled lives) with policy-makers.

Ours is a system that works well for anyone with knowledge of, and access to, the political process. It works less well for those who either don't know how to get involved, or who face problems in getting involved—like children, poor families, and the mentally or physically handicapped.

SIX GOOD REASONS TO GET INVOLVED

This is where you come in. As Americans we pride ourselves on having a system that's fair and open to all no matter what their age, or income, or race. But that does not just happen by accident, and neither will last years' prior victories stay won without vigilance.

Left on their own, some groups (e.g., "crack" babies, retarded citizens) tend to be voiceless. How they fare in the political process depends on the role that others are willing to play on their behalf. And when those "others" (i.e. you and me) fail to get involved, too often the voiceless get left out.

Fortunately, when more of us get involved, wonderful things can happen. All of the legislative victories of recent years—civil rights for people with disabilities, child care for working parents, health care for low-income families, more community-based services for the mentally ill, fairer budgets and tax systems, child welfare services and nursing home reforms, and many, many more—are the direct result of advocacy. They represent a tremendous achievement through which millions of Americans have been helped to a better life, and in which millions of ordinary Americans can take pride. Getting involved won't always lead to victory, but not getting involved never does.

Besides, advocacy is fun. There's a tremendous exhilaration in winning, as well as a lot of satisfaction just in trying. But if making your corner of the world a better place and having a good time are not reason enough, here are six more.

Charity Is Not Enough

A lot can be accomplished by caring people who offer a helping hand. It's great to volunteer at a shelter, or donate toys to the local hospital. But that won't always be enough.

Donated toys are no substitute for a way to pay the rent, and families with a disabled family member don't need a shelter nearby so much as they need affordable housing and access to home-based care. Volunteers can't answer either of those needs unless they're also working for public policies to ensure the availability of low-cost housing or of the home-based services so many families need.

Even the nation's Catholic Bishops (no opponents of charity) acknowledged in 1988:

Charitable efforts cannot substitute for public policies that offer real opportunities and dignity....

That's where policy advocacy comes in. Without better public policies, many troubled families won't have what they need to be productive members of their communities. Advocacy can help change that.

Advocacy Has A Role For Everyone

It is possible to be an advocate by: informing others, writing or calling a policy-maker, organizing a grass-roots campaign, or helping in the background (e.g. doing the research or writing a check).

Advocates for better social policies can be found anywhere: in public agencies and private; in clinical settings and direct service projects; among volunteers and professionals; on the boards of community agencies and business roundtables; whether voted into office or just voting.

Sometimes individual effort is all that is needed. A Texas social worker with an irregular work schedule used to monitor the weekly City Council meetings whenever possible. One day she heard a dog owner complain to the Council about the unfairness of making him pay a license fee when cat owners paid none (a differential the Council chose to ignore).

Some time later she heard the Council consider a proposal to cut services at a mental health clinic, for lack of what seemed a relatively modest sum. During a break, she called the pound and the SPCA, collecting estimates of the number of cats in the area. Then she made a quick calculation to pass on to one of the Council members. It showed that if the same fee required of dogs were also applied to all of the cats, there would be enough money to maintain mental health services—and dogs would win "equity" with cats. The Council agreed, and the services were saved.

Some Problems Require A Broad Attack

Other times, individual efforts are not enough. For years, women's groups and child health advocates scrambled to line up free health care for individual pregnant women whose incomes were too high for Medicaid in their state, but too low to afford private insurance. Each time an uninsured pregnant woman came to their attention, some one went through heroic efforts to find the care and support she needed. Over time, several (or several dozen) pregnant women per community were helped in that way. But many more, equally needy women and babies were not.

That's why advocacy groups across the country decided to attack the bigger problem: state Medicaid limits that excluded too many low-income pregnant women. They worked to persuade Governors, state legislatures, and eventually the U.S. Congress to change the rules, and bit by bit they have been winning.

That required a rather sophisticated effort which included: knowledge of the laws, the efforts of a group, the help of professional lobbyists, and sustained activity over a period of months or even years. (One of those involved, Rae Grad, is a nurse who now heads the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality. She began her advocacy "career" by writing and sending out a little newsletter, from home, while her children were small.)

Each victory along the way meant the involvement of countless ordinary people along with the professionals, but each victory also meant that many more high-risk women and infants would get help—including those in small towns and rural areas where volunteer medical care and advocacy groups are scarce.

Any time we insist on helping only through one-on-one, voluntary activity, we make others dependent on the whims and fashions of charity. And we effectively "write off" everyone who lives where the charity that's needed isn't available.

Government Policies Affect Everyone

There are also self-interested reasons to get involved, whether the people needing advocacy are related or not. Everyone with an interest in the future, for example, has a personal stake in policies for children. Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund, once remarked that depending upon what we do now for the children, before long they will either be supporting us, depending on us, or shooting at us.

Every level of government is important and plays a part. Some examples:

- Local school boards are responsible for the schools;
- County and city governments operate hospitals, mental health clinics, and social services;
- State governments decide who gets welfare and whether child care is licensed and affordable; and
- Federal laws influence such matters as whether there is housing available at a price that working families can afford, and whether tax policies are supportive of families with low wages.

Some of the more visionary members of the business community understand. They reach out to meet immediate needs by forming partnerships with individual schools, and work through the political process to improve conditions in all the schools. Business leaders in Chicago, for example, lobbied the state legislature on behalf of education reforms, while on the national scene, the business executives who make up the "Committee for Economic Development" have become powerful advocates for greater government investments in prenatal care, child care, and education.

Democracy Is Not A Spectator Sport

In a democracy where every voice and vote count, doing nothing is a political act; it's a vote for the status quo. Staying out of the process doesn't mean that laws won't get passed, it just means they will get passed without reflecting your priorities and wishes, or those of anyone you might speak for—especially those who've been disabled or abused, ill or in pain, troubled or poor.

If you feel intimidated or uncomfortable at the thought of speaking up or otherwise getting involved; if you've been thinking it is enough to be informed about the issues and cast your vote intelligently; then it's time to think again.

If you went to a restaurant just to read the menu you would be informed—but you'd be missing the point. At some point you have to decide what you want, what you're willing to pay for it, and engage with other people to get it.

That also applies to your role as a citizen in a democracy: being informed is not enough. You have to decide what you want from your government, what you are willing to pay for it, and engage with your elected representatives so they can help you get it.

Politicians Are People Too

Many city, county, and state elected officials work part-time in their political roles (often for very little pay), and the rest of the time in their family/bread-winning roles. They have little or no paid staff, and no magic way of knowing what is on the voters' minds. Nor can they afford fancy polls or surveys. "Feeling the pulse," as one local official said, "is often accidental." Unless constituents tell them, they don't know what people think.

Another problem arises when legislators must vote on matters outside their personal experience, and don't have any real feeling for the consequences of their votes. That's why a Utah state senator tells advocates to expose their elected officials to their issues in very human, personal ways. Invite them to spend an hour or two with emotionally disturbed children, she suggests, or to have dinner at a welfare family's home. This is a challenge just ripe for creative solutions.

For example, the women in one western state used the occasion of "Domestic Violence Awareness Month" to call relevant officials (the Attorney General, county attorneys, police and sheriffs' departments) every time a battered woman sought help at a domestic violence shelter that month, and tell the women's stories. It was their way of making the officials more aware of domestic violence.

A St. Louis-based group called ROWEL (the Reform Organization for Welfare) uses another approach: they've developed a "Welfare Simulation." During an hour which is structured to correspond to a month, elected officials (and others) play the part of someone who is elderly, disabled, poor, or on welfare, while others play the part of such community resources as the welfare and food stamp office, the church pantry, the pawnshop and grocery store. During the Simulation participants are subject to the welfare rules in their state and told that their job is to survive. The experience, however brief, reveals how hard it is to be poor in America – and how difficult it can be to get help. (The Simulation can be purchased and adapted for use anywhere.)

Above all, advocacy is a frame of mind. As everything mentioned thus far should make clear, advocacy is first and foremost a mindset – not a job title, occupation, or role in life. Whether it involves a single individual like the woman in Texas, or a group like the people in Washington State, advocates see opportunities when others only see obstacles, and work to change the institutions causing problems for everyone, rather than wait until after-the-fact or be satisfied with easing problems one-by-one.

SUBWAYS ARE FOR SPEAKING UP

I picked up one of my favorite, least-costly advocacy techniques one morning on the subway in Washington. The car was packed with tourists, though I noticed a woman I know about two-thirds of the way down the car. We waved to each other and smiled. Then, just as the subway lurched into motion she called my name: "Hey Nancy." When I turned to look at her she asked, "Did you see what the Senate Human Resources Committee did yesterday?" I felt so mortified; right out there in public, she was striking up a conversation about something I could read in my newspaper. But I had acknowledged her, so I could not be rude and pretend I hadn't heard.

"No," I replied, "what happened?" "Well," she said, "they did something yesterday that's going to affect every working family in America, and I'll bet most people don't even know about it." At that, heads all over the subway car perked up, and just as suddenly, I caught on. From then until we reached our subway stop, I fed her straight lines ("that's terrible...tell me more...."), and she spelled out more details. Soon those tourists were like people at a tennis match, heads swiveling back and forth between us.

When the subway stopped I caught up with her in the station and said that what she'd done was wonderful: "Those people were just lobbied by a pro. Do you do that very often?" "Oh sure," she replied, "I do it all the time. I'm especially fond of elevators—you know, they can't get off."

PART II

A CIVICS REVIEW

In just a few minutes that woman had reminded me what good advocacy is all about: speaking up, and seizing opportunities—in this case with one of the most powerful groups of all, the voters.

Every time I tell this story, listeners make up their own variations: one woman now uses trips to the grocery store with her son to educate other shoppers about third-world issues, two men report they've turned the corridors of their office building into classes on child welfare, and one woman now routinely "lobbies" other voters at her exercise class.

As my friend on the subway made so clear, you don't have to be an expert to make a difference, and you don't even have to go to Washington or the state capitol to lobby. Good advocates make opportunities everywhere they go. But your group's effectiveness (and ability to do more than just raise an issue) will often depend on getting directly involved in the policy process, and for that it's important to be reminded how the system works.

Unless you happen to live in a state capitol or work in a government job, it's easy to forget the things we all learned in high school civics. But policy advocacy efforts often depend on understanding how federal, state, and local government works. By getting involved you're likely to become a better, more knowledgeable citizen and voter.

There are always new faces to learn, and from time to time the details change, but the basics haven't changed since whenever you last had to learn them. And the best news is that there are points of influence at every level of government. "All politics is local"—that is, politics at any level has local elements. And the techniques you learn by dealing with local school boards are the same techniques you'll use in dealing with state legislators or U.S. Senators.

THE SYSTEM

There are three branches of government: a Legislative branch which enacts laws; an Executive branch which carries out laws; and a Judiciary branch which interprets laws (and resolves any conflicts between the other two branches).

Legislative

Congress is the federal legislative body; it consists of the Senate and House of Representatives, has a large staff (about 30,000 people), and meets year-round. Every state has two U.S. Senators and at least one Representative.

Every state but Nebraska also has a two-house legislature (the lower house is sometimes called the Assembly), but many state legislatures have very few staff, and meet for a limited number of days each year (a few only meet every other year).

City and County Councils are the most common form of local legislature, though some states have regional bodies as well.

Executive

The federal executive branch consists of the President and Vice President, 14 Cabinet-level departments (for example, the Department of Health and Human Services), 29 agencies (for example, the Central Intelligence Agency) and 11 independent regulatory commissions (like the Securities Exchange Commission). About 3,000,000 civilian and military employees work for the executive branch of the federal government.

Every state has a Governor and various administrative agencies (like a Department of Human Resources), and some also have independent agencies, boards, or commissions (often for Higher Education or a time-limited issue).

At the local level there is usually a Mayor, County Executive, and/or town manager and their various agencies (for example, the County Department of Social Services, or the City Transit Authority) making up the executive branch of government.

Judiciary

The federal Judiciary consists of the Supreme Court, the U.S. Court of Appeals, and the U.S. District Court.

States also have a Supreme Court and Court of Appeals, as well as trial Courts; the judges may be appointed or elected. Local governments tend to have Municipal Courts, plus Justice of the Peace Courts and Small Claims Courts.

The beauty of our system of government is that ultimately, **we**, not some agency or official, **are the government**. And each of the branches, at every level, is susceptible to citizen influence – to a greater or lesser degree.

All three branches of government, at every level, are directly accountable to us, the citizens. We just have to vote, use the media to expose problems, serve on advisory groups and as members of good government organizations, and be good citizens – in short, so long as we get involved.

INFLUENCING THE SYSTEM

The Legislative Branch

The ways in which citizens can influence legislative branch activity are almost limitless. Some of the many things citizens can do include:

- Suggest ideas for laws and draft them up,
- Build public support and educate others about the issue;
- Draw attention to proposed laws by working with the media,

- Testify as to the merits of various bills,
- Analyze budgets and offer alternatives, and
- Lobby for or against various bills' passage.

Some situations offer special opportunities. For example, the fact that most state legislators have little or no paid staff makes them heavily reliant on citizens to offer ideas for legislation, provide the research, and even identify potential witnesses for hearings – in effect acting as "staff" for the legislators (some actually work in their legislators' offices as volunteers). At the national level where there are paid staff, meeting with them can often be as good as (or better than) meeting with their bosses. They can always use the help of good advocates.

Advocacy groups have a special role to play. For example, they can bring up issues that would otherwise get missed (like the lack of services for severely emotionally disturbed people). Advocates can assure that those directly affected (in this case, the families of the emotionally disturbed) don't find themselves waging lonely battles for better policies. And advocates can push the limits of a debate, thus insuring that something more than the easy, politically popular causes, get attention.

On the federal level, a stunning legislative victory was won in 1990 by groups representing people with disabilities (who used all of these techniques – drafting laws, testifying, using media, lobbying for passage). For years they did battle to convince the Congress and the President that it is in the national interest to give disabled people access to society. Their efforts finally paid off in the ADA – the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 – a law which extends the protections of the Civil Rights Act to everyone with physical or mental disabilities.

That law did not come from some Senator or Representative, but sprang directly from the mouths, pens, fact sheets, and lobbying of thousands of disabled people and their families across America. When President Bush signed the bill in a ceremony on the White House lawn, he said it marked "Independence Day" for millions of disabled Americans, and they had won it themselves.

The Executive Branch

Citizens can influence executive branch policy in many ways. They can:

- Monitor program operation or serve as volunteers.
- File comments on the regulations that govern programs.
- Call public attention to proposed regulations.
- Get their elected representatives to monitor programs and comment on regulations.
- Challenge policies or regulations in the courts whenever they prove inconsistent with the law.

Policy advocates play a critical role when they work to influence the regulations that carry out laws. It is an activity that has proved to be increasingly important.

Laws are often written in language that is deliberately vague. So, after a law is passed, the relevant executive branch agency has to draw up regulations – which are the rules that actually govern day-to-day operation of the programs. Thanks to the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), every proposed federal regulation has to be published in a document called the *Federal Register* (which is available in every government depository library and many local public libraries), and citizens must be given an opportunity to recommend changes in the regulations before they are final-

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

The description below is a skeleton version that applies equally to state and federal legislation (with some minor differences) and sets out the basic steps. Descriptions tailored to the rules in your state are also available in most communities from the League of Women Voters, many trade associations, and advocacy groups.

Keep in mind: a lot of other things are going on at the same time (budget decisions, oversight hearings, various crises, running the government, running for reelection). And, some of these stages can take weeks, months, or even years, so perseverence is essential. In the federal Congress, a bill that is passed and signed into law in less than three years is considered "fast." Longer is common.

But if that is a warning not to expect quick victories, it is also a reminder that there will be many opportunities along the way to influence policies as they are made.

The Process

Anyone can offer ideas for a bill and even draft a bill, but *only a sitting member of a legislative body can introduce a bill.* Legislatures employ technical drafters who will take the ideas and put them in the required (often less readable) form, but the ideas can come from anyone.

Once a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a committee (based on subject matter) and the Committee Chair then assigns it to a Subcommittee. Normally hearings are held first in the Subcommittee, followed by debate, discussion, and a process known as "mark up." That's where members go over the bill and literally "mark it up" to reflect any changes they want. (This is often a critical stage since other legislators tend to be guided by the members of the committee with jurisdiction over an issue.) Committee action is particularly susceptible to citizen influence; advocates can testify, provide information, work with the media, and generally help shape what the Committee decides.

If a majority of a sub-committee votes to report the bill out, it goes before the full committee and the process begins again: hearings, debate, discussion, mark-up, vote. *If a majority of the Committee vote in favor, the bill then goes to the floor.* (In the U.S. House of Representatives—and most state legislatures—there is one additional step: bills must also go through a Rules Committee which determines whether bills get to the floor, and sometimes even the terms of the debate.) Detailed *bill reports* usually accompany bills and reflect what the legislators intended. Executive agencies and Courts later rely on them in drafting regulations or resolving any conflicts that arise.

Every member of the body has an opportunity to influence every bill on the House or Senate floor, through: *debate, amendment, and voting to have it pass or die.* The same process has to be completed by both houses.

If there are differences between the House and Senate versions, a *conference committee* is appointed, with members drawn from the relevant committees of both houses. Conferees are responsible for reconciling any differences between the two versions, and the results of their deliberation have to go back in identical form to each house to be voted on once more. It is only *after the conference committee version of the bill has won a majority in both houses that the bill goes to the President or Governor.* If the bill is not vetoed, but signed, it becomes law.

ized. (Similar publications exist in most states, though not every state has a law like the APA.) The opportunity to comment can be a formidable power, especially since once they are issued in final form, **regulations have the force of law.**

One memorable use of citizen power to influence regulations occurred when the Reagan Administration attempted to save money in the school lunch program by counting ketchup as a vegetable. The change was incorporated in draft regulations and published in the *Federal Register.*

A small, not-for-profit anti-hunger organization noticed the change. Using the media to publicize the issue, they urged parents, teachers, nutritionists, and ordinary voters to express their views. By the thousands, they did: soon the government was flooded with outraged letters of comment. As a result, the draft regulations were re-written (ketchup was NOT counted as a vegetable), and the public show of support for the school meal program caused it to become, in the words of one Senate aide: "as politically untouchable as social security."

Citizen groups can also insure that programs operate as they should on an ongoing basis by serving on advisory groups, monitoring programs, and issuing public reports. The day-to-day quality of nursing homes, training programs, or school meals in many communities is directly related to the presence (or absence) of citizens who monitor their operation and publicize the findings.

The Judiciary

The judiciary is less open to citizen influence, but even it offers opportunities. Citizens can:

- Participate in "Friend of the Court" briefs.
- File, threaten, or cooperate in a lawsuit.
- Take part in an appeals process, or
- Serve as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or Guardian Ad Litem with the courts.

The Judiciary is rightly thought of as the branch of government least susceptible to citizen influence, but that is true chiefly in terms of traditional lobbying. We can't (and shouldn't) try to "lobby" judges. But that is not the only way for citizens to have an impact through the courts. Lawsuits, complaints, and Friend-of-the-Court briefs, are all useful tools.

A ***lawsuit*** forced the Social Security Administration to include autism, mental impairments, and other severe disabilities in children as grounds for Supplemental Security Income eligibility. Because advocates spoke up and refused to be brushed aside (the effort took seven years), tens of thousands of disabled children from families with modest incomes will get help.

At the local level, sometimes the ***threat of a lawsuit*** is enough to get action—for example, from a school district that is dragging its feet under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and refusing to "mainstream" disabled children.

Or, citizens can file ***complaints*** if they believe a law is being ignored. Citizen complaints have resulted in better action on child abuse reports, more thorough investigations by nursing home licensing bodies, and increased access to public transportation for people with physical disabilities.

Sometimes the best vehicle for judicial participation is by filing, or agreeing to sign onto, a ***Friend of the Court brief*** which lays out the views of people with direct knowledge of the impact a Court decision is likely to have.

E.g., ethicists concerned with the right-to-die issue believe that Courts at all levels are eager to get a broad spectrum of public opinion on the issue from religious, consumer, and advocacy organizations, particularly as more cases involving the terminally ill and people in "a persistent vegetative state," move through the courts.

And advocates can help others go through an ***appeals process*** if they feel a benefit has been unfairly denied. Appeals of benefit denials are won far more often when the claimant is accompanied by a knowledgeable advocate.

DON'T FORGET LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Perhaps the most overlooked target for influence is local government. Citizens who remember to write or call their state or federal representatives often forget to use the influence they have in their local communities – even though it probably is greatest there. Consider all of the ways in which schools, hospitals, and social agencies get public support: e.g. through tax breaks, gifts, in-kind support, tax-exempt donations, and special zoning provisions. You can use that support as leverage whenever a tax-supported institution fails to meet the needs of vulnerable citizens. And the results can be dramatic.

Anti-hunger advocates in Pittsburgh persuaded their city government to create a "food policy" commission. The Commission is taking up such issues as how to keep grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods, and whether public transportation routes are convenient to the grocery stores. Creating the Commission required educating both the public and elected officials alike, and took time, but the results were worth it.

One clear advantage of working locally is that frequently the advocacy issues may spring up, and get settled, fast. After the Monroe (Indiana) County Council voted 4-3 to make drastic cuts in support of the Stonebelt Center for the Disabled (a facility for the mentally retarded), a single phone call to friends of the Center helped turn the issue around. Once alerted, family, friends, clients and professionals who knew the Center's work decided to ask that the vote be reversed. It took only 40-50 people at the next Council meeting a few weeks later, but many of them – clients included – spoke up. Council members were so impressed that by the end of the evening they voted unanimously to rescind the earlier cuts.

A consumer group in Florida was equally effective. When they learned that a nearby hospital wanted to build a new clinic, they pressured their local health agency to hold public hearings on the hospital's request – and then provided evidence that the hospital had been turning away low-income patients. Thanks to the public hearing calling attention to the problem, the hospital agreed to change its policies.

BASIC TOOLS

Overall, there are three ways to communicate your views: you can *write*, you can *call*, or you can *visit*. And there are two audiences for your letters, calls, and visits. The first is *policy makers,* but an equally important audience is *other voters*.

1.Writing a Legislator or Policy Maker

Politicians and other decision-makers pay attention to their mail. Responding to concerned citizens is good politics and crucial to survival. Every letter counts, but a personal letter is more effective than a form letter or petition.

Most state legislators (and some on the national scene) say that *15 letters* on a single issue will get their attention. To a part-time legislator with no paid staff, three or four dozen letters can seem like an avalanche. The same is true for agency officials, county commissioners and mayors.

Letters to policy makers (all kinds) should:

Be concise, informed, and polite;

Be short (1-2 pages) and legible;

State your purpose in the first paragraph.

If your letter is about a bill or specific policy:

- Cite the bill or policy by name (or number);
- Say whether you support or oppose it and why;
- Be factual and speak from your own experience or knowledge;
- Ask for their views on the issue or bill.

Your letters don't need to be on fancy stationery or written in technical, legal language. A rough letter, any letter, is always better than no letter at all.

2. Calling a Legislator or Policy Maker

Politicians and decision-makers also pay attention when citizens take the trouble to call and convey their views, and the same general rules apply. Let them know concisely: who you are, what you are calling about, and what you want from them (e.g. support for a bill, opposition to a budget cut, action on a proposal). If there is a message machine, state who you are and what you want them to support or reject.

Note: This is an especially good task for the politically shy because as often as not, calls are answered by a receptionist or a machine. Either way, callers only need to leave their message, name, and address or phone number. No questions are asked, no positions are challenged.

3. Visiting a Legislator or Policy Maker

Elected officials can be visited on the job (in Washington, the State Capitol, the City Council chambers), in their local offices, or whenever they are engaged in public business (e.g. at a rally or parade, at a fund-raiser or speech appearance, in the statehouse corridors). When the legislature is in session, about the only occasions that are "off limits" are those which are obviously personal or family occasions.

Often you will only get a few minutes to make your point so it helps to have ready a short, 90-second version of what you want to say. And it is always smart to use that 90-second version first thing, followed by more details, or a more elaborate version of your message if there is time.

A visit to a policy maker (all kinds) should include:

- Who you are and any group you represent;
- The issue of concern to you;
- What you want from them (support for a bill, a budget request, zoning variance, policy revisions);
- How you mean to share the results of this meeting with others (through a mailing or newsletter, in person);
- A fact sheet with the outlines of your basic message, plus your name and telephone number for more information.

Whenever possible, schedule an appointment in advance, and always thank them for their time or any of their recent actions of which you approve.

However you go about it, it helps to remember two things:

One: Policy makers won't think you are rude for stating what you want, and may think it odd if you don't. *Part of their job is to be asked, and part of your job is to ask.*

Two: You can't be persuasive if you are not understood. Avoid jargon, technical terms, or initials (unless you are very certain they are being understood), and be prepared to go over the basics if necessary. For example, SCAN means the "Student Counselling and Assistance Network" to some, but to others it's only a furniture store.

SPECIAL TIPS FOR THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Very few of the bills introduced in any body become law. In the U.S. Congress as well as most states, only about 10-15% of the bills introduced become law. A classic study by Ron Dear and Rino Patti of the bills introduced over several years in the Washington state legislature, yielded seven tactics that were likely to improve a bill's chances of success. The bills that made it out of committee and onto the floor tended to share the following characteristics.

Factors That Foster Success

Early introduction. If your state allows bills to be pre-filed before the session formally begins, that's a good time to get your bill introduced. It means there will be more time to consider it, hold hearings on it, build support for it, raise and answer questions about it.

Multiple sponsors. A bill that has several sponsors from the outset tends to look more like a winner. Bills with only one sponsor, by contrast, are sometimes assumed to be introduced just to please a constituent or do somebody a favor but not as a serious legislative proposal. Multiple sponsors increase credibility and also the number of advocates working for its success.

Bi-partisan Sponsorship. It is always essential to have sponsors from the party in the majority, but unless the legislature is overwhelmingly dominated by one party, it helps a bill's credibility and chances if its sponsors come from both parties. (On the national level, and anywhere that margins are close or party discipline is unreliable, bipartisan sponsorship is essential.)

Support of Governor and Relevant Executive Agency. Since the executive branch will have to administer the resulting program (and in any case tends to have data, information, and expertise), legislators often are influenced by their support or opposition. If

support is out of the question, the next best option is executive branch neutrality. The worst posture is outright opposition.

Influential Sponsors. The job of getting a bill through hearings and out to the floor will be much easier if the Chair or highest ranking minority members of the subcommittees and committees are sponsors of the bill. If they, or highly respected senior members of the body, become sponsors and use their influence on its behalf, that's half the battle.

Open Hearings. Hearings are a good opportunity to make a public record, bring an issue before the public, get questions and points of opposition out in the open and dealt with, and to give the advocacy groups a rallying point.

Amendments. Some advocates think their proposal has to be enacted exactly as they conceived it. That rarely happens. In fact, bills that are not amended tend to die. That's because everyone who amends a proposal has to be familiar with it and develops a bit of "ownership," a stake in its future if you will. Encourage amendments; they'll increase your bill's chances of success.

Ultimately, even these seven tactics are no guarantee of success. Bills are more likely to pass if they involve low costs, non-controversial beneficiaries and purposes, and little significant change. Bills to create "National Tuna Week," or name a building, have an easier time than bills to provide comprehensive health or human services to low-income families. Knowing the process won't insure victory, but not knowing it makes it hard to even be a player.

Just keep reminding yourself: laws will be passed with you or without you. The choice is yours.

Ways to Be Heard

While it is true that any individual can be involved in the policy process, it is often easier for groups to have a significant impact simply because of the numbers they represent.

A legislative committee that is holding hearings can schedule 10 witnesses who represent only themselves. Or, it can schedule 10 witnesses who represent 5 organizations plus 5 coalitions—with a combined membership of several thousand voters. Since the same amount of time is involved for the legislators, there is good reason for them to invite groups rather than individuals to participate.

Providing testimony is a particularly useful way to take part in the process.

Testimony provides a written record of the various views on an issue.

Testimony offers a legitimate way to educate the public on an issue, using the media.

Testimony forces groups to clarify their views and present a unified position of support or opposition.

Testimony can be an effective way to influence legislators.

In order to testify at a public hearing, you need to contact the staff of the legislative committee (or city or county council) and ask to be considered as a witness. They will need a brief synopsis of your views and who you represent, as well as any personal stake you have in the outcome.

Note: preparing and presenting testimony is NOT considered lobbying by the Internal Revenue Service.

Effective testimony includes:

- An easily understood, jargon-free, 5-10 minute statement, focused on the isssue before the committee;
- The basic facts, including who you represent and your involvement in the issue;
- A clear statement of your points of agreement or disagreement with what is being discussed (for example, a bill or budget item);
- Changes you would like made;
- Real examples of people who will be affected by the matter being discussed, and how (media work can be especially effective here);
- A rebuttal of the opposition's main argument(s).

Not only can testimony be used to educate the media and the decision-makers, it can also be used to educate your own members, and to help clarify your position vis-a-vis other groups in the community.

When actually presenting testimony, it is essential to have a short summary with just the central highlights ready, because Committee hearings are often interrupted or cut short. Know the material so well that you can look Committee members in the eye rather than staring at your paper as you read. Since members may ask questions, it helps to have answers to the most likely questions prepared (and rehearsed) in advance.

Lobbying is another good way to be involved.

Lobbying may once have been the province of cigar-chomping wheeler-dealers doling out cash, but today it is a more open, established part of the process. Lobbying is how citizens—everyone from paid professionals to political neophytes—make their views known to decision-makers about a pending or proposed change in public policy.

It is particularly important that the not-for-profit community lobby. Without their presence, the system and its policy products will likely reflect only the interests of those concerned with maximizing profits. That works against many health and human services, which frequently are operated by religious organizations and other not-for-profit organizations.

Regulations issued by the IRS in 1990 make explicit once again the intent of Congress that non-profits have a right to lobby, and should be encouraged to do so.

The **object of lobbying** is to bring to bear whatever power you have to influence legislators' votes, through:

Information and education (fact sheets, analyses, direct experience, reports);

Numbers of voters (grass roots lobbying, helping in campaigns, exhibiting campaign signs);

Use of media (to get attention, make an issue "hot," enlist emotions, personalize an issue);

Talking (shmoozing, cajoling, discussing, persuading, negotiating).

The object is not to be liked, but to be respected and listened to. At the heart of the process is the perception of *power*—who has it; how it is wielded; who wins; who loses. You needn't have money to convey power; commitment, persistence, voters, the ability to attract the media—all are forms of power available to advocates.

The easiest way to get involved in lobbying is to hire a professional to represent your group with the legislature. But even the "hired guns" need to show that real voters and taxpayers stand behind them. *Personal lobbying is one of the best ways to be effective in the political arena.*

Effective lobbying includes;

- Marshalling expertise (including personal accounts of individuals who will be affected);
- Keeping track of relevant legislation;
- Paying special attention to Committee votes (which are sometimes NOT published);
- Working with other lobbyists;
- Getting to know the staff (including the secretary's name);
- Educating others (including friendly legislators);
- Training others how to lobby and otherwise get involved.

Special tips. Experienced lobbyists always add: wear comfortable shoes, and leave a fact sheet behind with your name, telephone number, and the key points you want to make.

And never be disappointed at meeting with staff instead. They have a lot of influence with their bosses, know the issues, and do much of the work.

REACHING OTHER VOTERS

Each of these basic tools can easily be adapted to reach that second audience of *other voters*.

- A letter to your state Senator can be re-written as a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
- The same message you convey in a call to your Representative's office could also be relayed to the audience of a radio "call-in" show.
- The reasons you give a legislator for supporting a bill could be repeated at an adult Sunday school class or PTA meeting.

Two Additional Tips

A Texas legislator once commented that consciously or not, most legislators are looking for issues that are "win-win". By that he meant: the legislator "wins" when the proposal is introduced, through favorable media attention and the approval of other voters; and "wins" again at campaign time, because the supporters of the bill show up to help answer phones, contribute money, put signs on their lawns, and generally help with re-election.

Most health and human services issues, by contrast, are what he described as "lose-lose". By that he meant that when the proposal is introduced the legislator "loses" because often there is negative media attention (or none at all), and the disapproval (or indifference) of other voters; and then at campaign time the legislators "lose" again because the bill's supporters are nowhere to be seen. If we want legislators to champion our policies, he was saying, we'd better be prepared to help make our issues "winners" at some point.

A Michigan state legislator made the same point another way. The decision is easy, he explained, when a legislator is asked to support something that is "good policy/good politics"—like indexing social security benefits. That was the right thing to do, and also good politics.

It is equally easy to make a decision not to support something that is "bad policy/bad politics"—like designating scholarship funds for the Ku Klux Klan. That choice is equally clear.

What makes many health and human services issues difficult to suport, he explained, is that they often represent "good policy/bad

politics." They may be the right choice, but they're hard to support because being associated with them has negative political consequences. Our job as advocates is to turn our issues into "good policy/good politics."

But getting laws passed is only one part of the process.

COMMENTING ON A REGULATION

Once a law is passed, an executive branch agency becomes responsible for carrying it out. Good advocates will birddog a law's implementation just as thoroughly as they did the legislative process.

The first step is usually drafting the regulations to govern the program. For nearly every Regulation, a "Notice of Proposed Rulemaking" is published by the responsible government agency so the public can comment.

States may issue regulations through a Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General's, or some other office. It is important to learn which office publishes draft and final regulations in your state.

At the federal level, final regulations and "Notices of Proposed Rulemaking," are published in a five-day-a-week publication called the *Federal Register*, which is available in many libraries or from the local, regional, or national office of the agency affected.

States also publish proposed regulations, but usually on a monthly or weekly basis. Both publications are available at federal Depository libraries, and the agencies responsible for the programs.

But few people are likely to go visit a depository library every week just to read through the latest regulations, and even if they did, sometimes the regulations are hard to understand. That's where linking up with a good advocacy group comes in. Advocacy groups—state and national—not only get copies of the regulations important to their issues, they analyze them, clarify them, and notify the people on their mailing lists when comment letters are needed. Best of all, they are likely to alert you to key issues to look out for, and may offer sample comment letters to get you started. But the basic process is pretty straightforward.

Each "Notice" includes information that makes it easy for citizens to comment: the name of the agency issuing the regulation, a summary of the action being taken, the date by which comment letters are needed, a person and telephone number to contact with any questions, where to address your comments, and an explanation of what the regulation contains.

Then the full text of the proposed regulation follows. (This part may be less understandable because it is written to meet legal standards.)

Comment letters should:

- Briefly describe your group, note any expertise you have and why you are interested in the proposed regulation;
- Acknowledge points you agree with, and identify points you disagree with;
- Describe factual situations that would be affected by the regulation, and if possible, suggest alternative language.

Since each letter is counted separately, it is best to ask every member of your group to send one rather than have a single letter with multiple signatures. Personalizing each letter also makes an impact. And it often helps to

send a copy of your comment letter to your senators and representatives.

Don't Forget, at every step in the process policy advocacy has a role for everyone: people to write letters, make phone calls, get facts, issue reports, work with media, strategize, lobby, discuss, think, show up, care. Some of that is sure to describe you. And don't be concerned if your organization is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; work on regulations does *not* count as lobbying.

TAKING PART IN A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

The battle for national child care legislation is a case in point. In 1986, a small group of child care advocates began meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss what they'd like to see in a federal child care bill. Before long over 100 national organizations were involved in the "Alliance for Better Child Care" (or ABC), with a smaller core group for the detail work. At the same time, state-level ABC coalitions were formed, especially in states and congressional districts where key legislators (Republicans and Democrats) lived.

KNOW YOUR STATE

Being an effective advocate means different things in different states. If your state has a very short legislative session (6-12 weeks each year), then it may be more important to have a good, on-going relationship with the people who work in the Governor's office or executive branch agencies. A mental health advocate in Louisiana said, "I spend very little time at the legislature. If my items aren't included in the Governor's budget, there simply isn't time to get them included once the legislature convenes." To advocates in a state with a year-long legislative session, that approach would not make sense. You need to know the peculiarities of your state — and spending time with more experienced advocates is a quick way to do the job.

In the fall of 1987, when Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut) introduced the Act for Better Child Care, press conferences were also held in key congressional districts nationwide. But if the Alliance for Better Child Care had only attracted liberal Democrats like Dodd, it would not have gotten very far. That's where state and local advocates in small towns and conservative districts proved pivotal. One of their converts was Orin Hatch, a conservative Republican from Utah.

In 1988 he also introduced a child care bill. It differed in many ways from the Dodd bill, but it acknowledged that there was a need for child care, and that the federal government had a role in meeting that need. That made it easier for conservatives of both parties (including then-candidate Bush) to sign on, and identified child care as an issue with appeal across the political spectrum.

Through it all, ABC supporters nationwide were at work: educating elected officials, getting stories in the local media, winning over other voters. One night after a meeting in a Methodist Church basement in northern

Illinois, someone asked a very specific question about ABC. The speaker said she didn't know the answer, but did know where to get it. There's no need to wait, another voice called out, "I'm the local "point person" for ABC. I can look the answer up tonight." By the end of 1990, the Act for Better Child Care had passed.

Sometimes commentators credit changing demographics (e.g. more mothers working, more single-parent families) with its passage. But what happened in that Methodist Church basement wasn't due to "demographics;" it was the result of good, old-fashioned, hard work and organizing. And everyone who spoke up, wrote a letter, made a call, signed a petition, contributed money, questioned a candidate, or raised the issue at a backyard barbecue, had played a part.

In some places local advocates made a deliberate choice to simply put themselves in the hands of the national advocates: rarely questioning, mostly just following orders. Others made a different choice. But before it was over, winning national child care legislation had involved everyone from super-sophisticated national advocates, to absolute beginners. Best of all, they won; now working families everywhere will benefit as a result.

Of course, as by now you are quite aware, getting the law passed only concludes the first stage . The next stage requires being involved as the regulations are written and the law is carried out. And so, all across the country, child care advocates are serving on local advisory committees and keeping their members informed as each successive step occurs.

Being a good citizen is a bit like being a good parent: the job may change, but it never really ends.

NOTES

IT'S NO COINCIDENCE

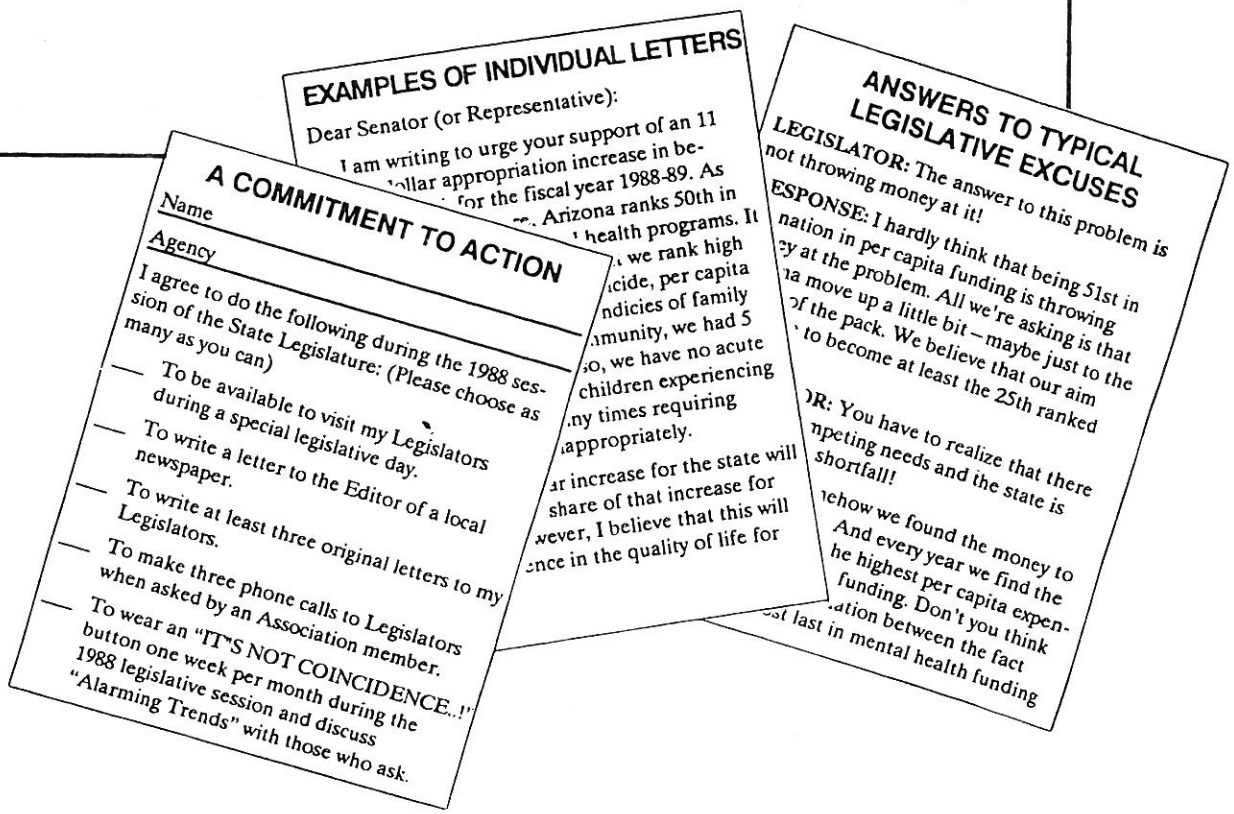
A few years ago, Arizonans concerned about mental illness were feeling discouraged. Services in their state were dismal, funding was scarce, and morale had hit bottom. It had gotten so bad that a mental health advisory group's members weren't even coming to their own meetings.

One day when only five or six had managed to show up, they talked about their pitiful condition. What made it so awful, one commented, was that their state was at the top of every list you wouldn't want to be at the top of: high infant mortality, high drop-out rates, high teen suicide, high practically everything bad.

Of course, said another, after all we're at the bottom of all the good lists: in services for early intervention, for troubled families, for preventive mental health, for practically anything that might help. It's no coincidence.

Right, everyone agreed, it's no coincidence. That's so obvious. We know it; we see it. Why doesn't everybody? Suddenly, the next step seemed obvious.

That was the beginning of the "It's No Coincidence" campaign, an effort that won the largest single appropriation for mental health services in the history of the state the first year, and increments each year since. They've got fact sheets, a speakers bureau, buttons (which some legislators wear), and a mental health advocacy group that grows in numbers, enthusiasm, and effectiveness every year.



EXAMPLES OF INDIVIDUAL LETTERS

Dear Senator (or Representative):

I am writing to urge your support of an 11 ...ollar appropriation increase in be- ... for the fiscal year 1988-89. As ... Arizona ranks 50th in ... health programs. It ... we rank high ...icide, per capita ...ndicies of family ...mmunity, we had 5 ...o, we have no acute ... children experiencing ...ny times requiring ...appropriately.

...r increase for the state will ... share of that increase for ...wever, I believe that this will ...nce in the quality of life for

A COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Name

Agency

I agree to do the following during the 1988 session of the State Legislature: (Please choose as many as you can)

— To be available to visit my Legislators during a special legislative day.

— To write a letter to the Editor of a local newspaper.

— To write at least three original letters to my Legislators.

— To make three phone calls to Legislators when asked by an Association member.

— To wear an "IT'S NOT COINCIDENCE..!" button one week per month during the 1988 legislative session and discuss "Alarming Trends" with those who ask.

ANSWERS TO TYPICAL LEGISLATIVE EXCUSES

LEGISLATOR: The answer to this problem is not throwing money at it!

...ESPONSE: I hardly think that being 51st in ...nation in per capita funding is throwing ...ey at the problem. All we're asking is that ...ia move up a little bit – maybe just to the ...of the pack. We believe that our aim ... to become at least the 25th ranked

...OR: You have to realize that there ...mpeting needs and the state is ... shortfall!

...ehow we found the money to ... And every year we find the ...he highest per capita expen- ... funding. Don't you think ...ation between the fact ...st last in mental health funding

PART III

GETTING STARTED

Once you're persuaded that more people need to be involved in advocacy and you've reminded yourself how the policy process works, it's time to start. It would be great if there were some easy rule to apply in deciding which issues to take on, and how to go about winning them, but unfortunately, there is no magic formula.

However there is a lot of useful advice around. It draws from a combination of common sense and the experience of an increasingly effective advocacy community.

The first piece of advice as you're getting started is simple. Remember that as a general rule, anything involving major change, significant costs, or controversy, will be relatively more time-consuming and difficult to achieve. Similarly, it is generally the case that anything involving only modest (or incremental) change, little or no cost, and a minimum of controversy, will be relatively easier to achieve. Either way, the size and complexity of the advocacy task have to be compared with the size and complexity of the resources you and your group can bring to bear. (That's not an argument for avoiding big issues, just a quick reality check.)

The next piece of advice is equally straight-forward: think. Any time you take to think through your issues, your goals, and your capabilities, will always be time well spent. An ill-considered effort can cost your group more than just disappointment. It can reflect poorly on your organization, demoralize your members, and maybe even establish bad precedents. A carefully-considered effort will provide useful lessons whatever the outcome.

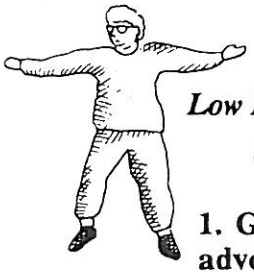
Now, just in case you or your colleagues are new to advocacy, or haven't done much policy advocacy in a while, here's an "Advocacy Fitness Plan"—with low impact, medium impact, and high impact exercises—to get you in shape. (Like the material in the Appendix section of this guide, this "Advocacy Fitness Plan" can be copied and used as a handout at future gatherings.)

An Advocacy Fitness Plan

Becoming "politically fit" is a lot like becoming physically fit. Team sports and exercise classes have their place, but sometimes there's just you and the t.v. – and nothing you can do about it. Even if others are theoretically available to run or shoot baskets, they may not be available on the same schedule. One way or another, being on your own (living in a rural area, leading a busy life, or just being shy) is no reason not to keep your "advocacy fitness" level high.

Physical fitness is a useful analogy to keep in mind for another reason as well. Just as your flesh-and-blood muscles need regular use, and increased activity over time, so do your political muscles. Stop using them altogether and you'll quickly become politically flabby; use them regularly and your level of "advocacy fitness" will soar.

So, what follows is a quick and easy, 10-step advocacy fitness plan, a kind of "aerobics for advocates." And, like those aerobics workouts on early morning TV, it has three levels: low, medium, and high impact (impact on you, that is, not on your issue or cause).



LEVEL I

Low Impact—Every MONTH do at least one of the following:

1. Get on the mailing list of an advocacy group that focuses on an issue you care about.

This is good because it supports advocacy efforts monetarily (usual annual costs run between $10 and $40). At the same time, you'll become better informed about the issue, and you'll learn when citizen action is most needed.

2. Enlist a friend.

Get someone you know interested in your issue and excited enough to do something – anything – about it (learning more counts, as does attending a meeting or showing up to volunteer on a one-shot basis). Don't worry about what they do; once "hooked" they'll figure out for themselves what's most comfortable.

3. Inform a stranger.

You can have an impact just by carrying on a conversation in a place where others are sure to hear: the subway, a meeting room, or corridor. You could post a fact sheet on the bulletin board in your apartment complex or local grocery store, put an informative bumper sticker on your car, or post something on a computer "bulletin board" for other subscribers to read. Or you could ask that a group you belong to (e.g. Rotary Club, church or synagogue, PTA, professional association) consider forming a task force on the issue you care most about.

This level is like the exercises where your feet don't leave the floor and your movements are quite gentle. But even if you get no farther than Level I, by the end of a year you will be better informed, and will have gotten a few more people thinking about others in your community.

LEVEL II

Medium Impact—Every WEEK do at least one of the following:

4. Write a policy-maker (federal, state, or local).

Practice what you already know; exercise those political muscles. Once you've done it a few times, it will get easier. As with most things in life, the first time is usually the hardest.

5. Call a policy-maker (federal, state, or local).

Ditto. It helps that U.S. Senators and Representatives all have local offices with local telephone numbers, and some have toll-free "800" lines as well. You may find yourself talking to a machine, but that's easier for some people, and your message will be conveyed.

6. Visit a policy-maker (federal, state, or local).

Ditto again. It's not enough to read about making a visit; sooner or later you need to use what you learned. Try it, you may like it. Those who start out feeling the most timid, the most reluctant, frequently turn out to be the best converts once they try. Sometimes novice lobbyists use words like "seductive," "addictive," and "intoxicating," to describe the experience.

This level is comparable to those exercises where the body movements are more energetic, the pace is faster, and a lot more bending and stretching is involved. But the impact can also be far more dramatic. *If everyone who claimed to care about others wrote, called, or visited a policy-maker every week, health and human services would fare very differently in the political process.* So long as most of the people who claim to be concerned keep their concern to themselves, social issues will continue to get only a fraction of the public dollars and political attention afforded to just about everything else.

LEVEL III

High Impact—Every WEEK, in addition, do at least one of the following:

7, 8, 9. "Write," "call," or "visit" other voters.

Every week, automatically re-cast your letters, calls, and visits for use with a larger audience: the voting public. Every time you write, call or visit a policy-maker, think of a way to get the same message across to other voters. Re-write the letter to your legislator as a letter-to-the-editor; call a radio call-in show with the message you left on your council member's message machine; repeat what you said to the mayor at the Rotary Club or with your aerobics group. That way you'll double (or triple) your impact with only a fraction more investment of energy and time.

This level is like the exercise routine where you jump up and down, fling out your arms and legs, and quickly work up a sweat. At this point you will be a true citizen activist, with advocacy muscles that are taut and working at their peak. Go for it.

BONUS POINTS

10. Work for a visionary goal.

While every effort counts, groups still stand a greater chance of success. That said, even very effective groups can sometimes get so caught up in responding on an immediate, practical level that they lose perspective. It is essential, as the old civil rights refrain goes, to "keep your eyes on the prize."

So, for the greatest impact, join with the advocacy group of your choice to work for at least one visionary goal. It is important that welfare reform advocates think in terms of "moving families out of poverty," not just "moving families off of welfare;" important that domestic violence advocates work toward "creating a less-violent society," even as they fight for "increasing the sensitivity of police."

Management objectives, organization charts, and inter-agency agreements all have their place, but good advocates must never forget that a better world, not the next annual report, is what these efforts are all about.

Conditions will vary from place to place, but a 5-10 person committee is usually a good place to start. Sometimes they'll come together out of a shared concern, or because they are looking for new ways to be effective against old problems. Other times you'll find yourself drafting people.

Once they are assembled, you'll need a plan. When it comes to working out an advocacy plan, there are probably as many formulas as there are advocates, but most include the following five ingredients in some form or other.

1. Identify your issue, and goal(s).

An *issue* is just the problem that affects a significant number of people, and that you wish to do something about. For example, if child abuse is increasing in your community, that might contain a good issue.

Your *goal* is what you hope to accomplish, the objective toward which your advocacy efforts are directed. Ending all violence against children, for example, is a laudable long-term goal, but it is too sweeping for most groups to build an advocacy plan around. For starters, few could command the resources required, or even know where to begin.

Increasing the number of child protective services staff, on the other hand, is a narrower goal, but one which could help many vulnerable children. Moreover, it is specific enough to build a plan around and possibly win—and it is consistent with the long-term goal. From an advocacy perspective that makes it a better choice. (You will save yourself a lot of grief if, early on, you define your issue and goals as clearly and specifically as possible, and relate both to your resources.)

As you plan, it is important to be sure you represent those you are speaking for, and not just your own ideas of what is needed. Good advocates—like the organizers of the Molar Majority—do. What their constituents wished is what they pursued. Nobody likes to be spoken for without being consulted.

This is something every good advocate grapples with; it is especially sensitive if the people involved are mentally competent but frightened and overwhelmed (for example, someone who's just been diagnosed as HIV-positive), or unable to speak for themselves (for example, mentally retarded infants).

Who can speak for them? One answer is to rely on surrogates, like family members or a group whose members are similarly affected. A good test is to ask who *YOU* would want as your advocate under similar circumstances—a doctor? your family? a court-appointed ethicist? an advocacy group? And what if you were just unsure how the policy process works—would that give someone else the right to speak for you? *This is one issue you have to think through carefully, and plan for, in advance.*

2. Get the facts.

There are few worse advocates than people with good intentions and bad information. Good advocacy plans are based on solid facts, not anecdotes, guesses, or whatever happened to make it into the media.

It is easy to assume the worst (about the mental health system, government bureaucrats, local schools), based on an anecdote or two. A quick fact-finding effort can help establish whether the anecdotes are the exception or part of a pattern.

It is also important to establish what is causing the problem and where you need to intervene to alleviate it. It won't help to complain to your United States Senator about

local welfare grant levels; they are decided by Governors and state legislators. Nor does it work to fuss at state legislators over Head Start – which is federal.

Make a check-list of what you need to know to proceed, and make assignments for getting it. Collecting information about a problem or its possible solution isn't all drudgery. It can be a good way to get your volunteers invested in an issue, and fact-finding is something even shy people can do.

Getting the facts may require some research or a survey of your own, but there is a staggering amount of information already available. Try that route first. There are studies, reports, surveys, planning documents, testimony, commission recommendations/task force proposals. They're available from state legislatures, government agencies at every level, at universities, and in the files of countless not-for-profit groups. Local advocates and chapters of national groups are a good place to start (for example, a statewide child advocacy group would have good basic statistics related to children in your state, and the state chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill would have good information on needs and services related to mental health), as are state chapters of professional organizations (for example, the American Public Health Association or the National Association of Social Workers).

3. Develop a strategy.

Once you've got your issue clearly defined, and you've learned as much as you can about the problem and who's responsible for it, it's time to map out a strategy. Advocates spend a lot of time reacting to others, but good advocates are pro-active as well.

Having decided on an issue – e.g. increasing the number of child protective services workers, you will need to make that goal more specific – e.g. how many more? by what date? Developing an advocacy strategy is a lot like the process you'd go through to organize a fund-raiser or put on a show.

You'd draw up a plan, set some goals, and make a calendar with deadlines for achieving them. You'd make lists; think through who is good at what; get a good committee; and recruit volunteers for the other jobs needing to be done. Early on you'd figure out how much you can spend, where it will come from, and who will be responsible for the practical details (for example, budgets, signing correspondence, keeping records).

As you develop your advocacy strategy, be honest about your capacities. Suing the department responsible for child abuse might seem appealing, but it is a costly strategy that requires attorneys on staff, or willing to work for free. You need to consider the personnel and dollars required for various strategies, as well as how long they'd take before showing results. A small group that is new to advocacy might do better to begin with something time-limited and very specific, whereas a group with well-established community ties and an experienced staff could consider something more ambitious and long-lasting. (Working in coalitions is one way to include elements of both.) Think through what you can do alone, and also what kind of help you might recruit if that's what is needed.

Finally, you need to consider the less tangible but ever-so-critical matter of "style." Welfare rights groups and the Junior League both support welfare reform, but their styles in approaching the issue will be different. Your advocacy efforts reflect on you and your group; plan your strategy accordingly.

4. Get to know the decision-makers and their staff.

"Knowing" the players isn't just a matter of being able to list their names.

Decision-makers are like anybody else: they don't like to be approached only when you want something, and they are appreciative if you take the time to understand the constraints they face. It always helps to recognize their needs: offer to do research, help in a campaign, pitch in when they need extra hands. It won't go unnoticed. Effective advocates cultivate relationships with decision-makers and their staffs over a long period of time, and understand the process well enough to know when to ask (or not). You shouldn't try to get a bill introduced at the end of a session, for example, or seek funding for a project after the budget has been set.

Getting to know the decision-makers has another clear advantage: it teaches who has what kinds of power at varying levels of government, so you won't be asking for things they cannot deliver.

A state-wide "Human Services Coalition" in Utah holds monthly meetings with key staff from the Departments of Health and Human Services. Over the years those Friday afternoon sessions have provided an effective form of feedback about program operation to the policy makers. But they also offer a way for advocates and policy makers to get to know one another in a collegial and non-adversarial setting,while learning what different staff can—and cannot—do.

5. Broaden your base of support.

Children's organizations may be the logical place to start if you are trying to improve child protective services, but older relatives also feel outraged by child abuse and senior organizations might be very interested in policies to protect their grandchildren. So might a local school of public health, or local merchants.

Think how striking it was when business executives joined forces with labor union leaders to consider proposals for national health care, or when sheriffs testified in favor of domestic violence shelters. Alliances like that are striking because they are unexpected, and signal that support is broader than previously supposed.

At some point you might wish to form or join a bigger coalition, so that is discussed in the next section. For now it is enough to note that in the world of public policy, success often depends on being able to show a broad range of support, and an absence (or neutrality) of the likely opposition.

WHO ELSE TO INVOLVE

You've gathered your information. You've developed a personal citizenship fitness plan. Now it's time to think once again in terms of your group.

As you think about who to involve in advocacy, you may be thinking about people with lobbying experience, or those who are known for having strong opinions. They should be included, but you'll miss a lot of talent if you stop there. In politics there are two rules—Rule # 1 is: "nothing happens over night;" and Rule # 2 is: "you can't change Rule # 1."

So when you think about the traits that produce good advocates, look for perseverance.

Good advocates, it's often said, can always be recognized by their running shoes; they are

the marathon types who pace themselves and never give up.

Next, look for a couple of noodges, sticklers for detail.

A lot of advocacy turns on small details and basic courtesies like thanking every city council member who supports your position, or following up meetings with state legislators with a personal note. President Bush still writes short, personal notes to thank people for their efforts, something he has done throughout his political career.

A third trait to look for is passion.

That's not the same as volume or drama – it's possible to feel passionately about social justice while speaking softly and working quietly. But it is what those Arizonans had. They weren't expert lobbyists, but they knew about mental illness first-hand, as family members, former patients, and professionals. This wasn't just a job for them, they cared.

Fourth, seek modesty, people who don't need the spotlight.

You can accomplish a lot in politics, the old saying goes, if you don't care who gets the credit. Often the advocates are working behind the scenes doing the leg-work, making the phone calls, drafting the speeches and letters-to-the-editor while the elected officials are getting their pictures in the paper and the plaques on their walls. Some of the best advocacy is felt rather than seen.

And don't be afraid to start small.

That's normal. It would be great if half the people in your group wanted to join in your advocacy effort from the start, but that is neither likely nor necessary.

Most advocacy efforts begin with, and are sustained by, small groups of dedicated people. Commitment, not quantity, is what counts:

- One grieving mother started M.A.D.D.;
- Three people stood at the South African embassy to challenge apartheid;
- A handful of families with terminally-ill members brought the hospice movement to America.

Sociologist Aldon Morris notes that only about 10-15% of the population sustained the civil rights movement. That's not surprising. There's never a time when most people are counted as activists, nor is that needed. What is needed is a core group of people serving as catalysts; they'll do the detail work and infuse other people with their passion.

Your job is to find and cultivate your group's "10%:" the people needed to sustain the efforts over the long haul.

A Special Word About Boards

There is a tendency in the non-profit world to think of Boards of Directors in terms of their ability to raise money and offer expert advice. That's not bad, it's just short-sighted. The greatest assets a social agency's board members may represent are their access to decision makers, their credibility in the broader community, and their power – all of which can be harnessed on behalf of the agency's mission and clientele. Board members often have an easier time getting appointments with legislators or a Governor's staff, and are likely to know other community leaders. That's a valuable asset.

If your Board does not have an advocacy plan of its own, develop one. Board members can educate their peers in the community,

help deflect community fears, organize public forums, and lobby. In addition, they can make the case that human services represent jobs and income to their communities, as well as services to vulnerable families. That alone is a form of power, but one that is too often overlooked. The Oklahoma legislature allocates more money per capita to non-profit youth-serving agencies than any other legislature in the country. That has been true ever since the agencies agreed that their Board members would lobby on behalf of their programs and "their" young people. Potential Board members who are not comfortable with the requirement are helped to find service on some other Board.

DON'T FORGET

Even though there is much about advocacy that is common to many other undertakings, there are a few special things worth keeping in mind.

- Whatever your long-term goal, try to build in an early, easy victory that's related to it. Nothing motivates like success and nothing discourages like inaction. Since advocacy efforts often move slowly, it helps to involve your fledgling group in anything that is consistent with your larger goals and likely to happen (or easy to win) – a small victory, but a victory. They'll share some of the credit, and be more willing to press on.
- Sort out which parts of your goal need government action and which can be accomplished without it. The strategies and personnel involved in each are often different, and the two should not be confused. Besides, elected officials don't like being asked for help that is available through the private sector, and vice versa.
- Expect to compromise. Evelyn Burns, who taught for many years at Columbia University, used to remind her students that compromise is part of politics; the trick comes in knowing when a compromise is acceptable. A small version of something good was usually all right, she argued, because you could always build on it in the future. But it is never good to agree to institutionalize something bad; once begun, bad practice is hard to stop.
- Remember what motivates you. Some advocates have a tendency to cite one terrible statistic after another, piling up every grim possibility imaginable. You'll need facts to be credible, but people are rarely moved by statistics, no matter how dramatic they may be. Michael Harrington, one of the great anti-poverty advocates once wrote, "a fact can be rationalized and explained away; an indignity cannot."
- Humanize your facts. Talk about people you know, not faceless categories. Hardly anyone would say "yes" to helping a statistic, but the reverse is also true – most people have a hard time denying help to someone they feel they know.
- And never forget to point out the good that will be accomplished; beating policy-makers up with bad news is more likely to paralyze than persuade.

What moves people is not just grim statistics but "a cocktail of fear and hope." The bad news may all be true, but good advocates offer policy-makers and fellow-citizens the hope that something can be done to turn it around.

SUCCESSFUL TECHNIQUES

As you may already have guessed, all through this manual you've been learning effective techniques to adapt for use in your own advocacy efforts. They have three broad purposes.

TO INFORM.

You can use the "*Advocacy Quiz*" at the beginning of Part I to help others understand how natural it is to be engaging in advocacy. Use it when conducting a workshop on advocacy, or when trying to get others to join your advocacy efforts.

An easy variant on that idea is to develop a different sort of "Quiz," one based on the most common misperceptions of your issue. When you do presentations to community groups on your issue (as compared with presentations on advocacy), begin by having the audience take the Quiz, and then discuss the answers. If you want to develop materials to accompany your talk, you might consider the format used in a New York State pamphlet which begins: "In 1492 everyone **knew** the world was flat. In 1917 everyone **knew** the Titanic was unsinkable." Today, you might continue, everyone **knows**...[and here you fill in a myth related to your issue]. "Myths die hard [insert the correct information here]."

Or, you might consider an "*It's No Coincidence Campaign*" designed around the unmet needs in your community. You could draw up the fact sheets making the connections, enlist supporters with a "Commitment to Action," draft sample letters-to-the-editor and answers to some of the politicians' most commonly-used excuses, find out what it would take to fill the gaps, and get started.

TO GET ACTION.

If plans are already underway and legislation is already pending in your state, but the legislators just aren't paying much attention, you might try to devise an attention-getting "*gimmick*" like the ones described throughout this manual (for example, the paper plate campaign, or supporting motherhood with apple pie). Gimmicks generally don't work on their own, but they can be very effective as part of a larger, well-considered strategy.

For example, one February a family planning group in New Hampshire followed up some of its public education efforts by sending every state legislator a valentine. It contained the results of a state-wide poll showing widespread citizen support for family planning. They described their mailing as "linking romance with responsibility," but they were also making an important political point. By calling the legislators' attention to public support for this once-controversial service, they were able to win the necessary funds.

TO WIN POLICY CHANGES.

A well-established group could decide to establish a "*legislative network.*" In recent years the Florida Nurses Association has identified a member in each state legislative and congressional district who is willing to work on legislative issues important to nurses. They agree to contact their legislators, and to try to get other nurses in their area to do the same.

Similarly, the Washington Council of Churches has established a "Congregation Action Network," or CAN, that began with a couple dozen congregations and now numbers in the hundreds. In each of those congregations, a coordinator agrees to be the conduit for all legislative alerts and related activity. Coordinators agree to recruit members of their parish to be part of the network, and generate 5-15 calls or letters on a limited

number of issues (no more than five) while the state legislature is in session. When that ends, congregation coordinators agree to do the same for 1 or 2 issues pending before the U.S. Congress.

Milwaukee also has a CAN, but its functions are a little different. Milwaukee's CAN coordinators and steering committees agree to set up two meetings a year between local legislators and members of participating congregations. In that way they put key decision-makers together with voters at two critical points: when this year's budget is being voted on, and again when next year's budget is being developed.

Each of these legislative networks has some common elements. The expectations of participants are time-limited and relatively modest (for example, 5-15 letters or calls on a limited number of issues each year; or 2 meetings). There is a staff person whose duties include nurturing the key contacts in the legislative network, and devoting time to them: answering their questions, working with them, helping them get whatever they need to be effective. And in each case sample materials are prepared to make network participation easier—sample letters, sample telephone scripts, sample fact sheets and issue papers.

Developing a legislative network is not a one-shot, or short-term effort. It requires knowledge and a degree of political sophistication, as well as an on-going commitment to advocacy. But it is within the reach of most organizations that follow policy issues, and it should be within the capabilities of any statewide coalition (e.g. on environmental or women's issues, or a human services network). Ambitious advocates might ask churches and synagogues to provide the calls and letters (since they meet regularly), while depending on organizations with quarterly or annual meetings to arrange the citizen/decision-maker forums.

However, whether as an individual, or as part of a group, it helps to remember: good advocacy doesn't always take money or sophistication, but it does take creativity and thought to come up with something that a lot of people can participate in, and which may have the desired effect.

Across the country, people with shoestring operations and political novices filling their ranks, are making up in commitment and creativity for what they lack in money and sophistication. And they are pulling off minor miracles—changing laws and budgets, winning better policies for vulnerable people and their families. You can be part of that. All you need to do is try.

PLANNING FOR ACTION:

A Do-er's Dozen

Here are a dozen items to guide the planning for your advocacy efforts. It is especially important to have clear answers to the first 5 before moving ahead. And remember, anything costly, controversial, or likely to involve major change takes longer.

1. Issue
2. Goal(s)
a.
b.
3. Who is the Advocacy for?
4. How will they be involved?
5. Who are the key policy-makers?
6. How much will it cost?
7. How will we raise the money?
8. What staff/volunteers are needed?

9. What strategies should be used with— (Use extra page)	
a. Own staff, board:	
b. Own members:	
c. Media:	
d. Decision-makers:	
e. Community leaders:	
f. Other groups:	

10. What is the timetable? (Use extra page)
11. Can we do this alone?
Yes ☐ No ☐
12. If we can't do it alone, who else should be involved?

MOTHERHOOD AND APPLE PIE

When Congress gave states the option of expanding their Medicaid programs to cover more pregnant women and children, maternal and child health advocates in Missouri immediately began planning how to persuade their legislature to agree.

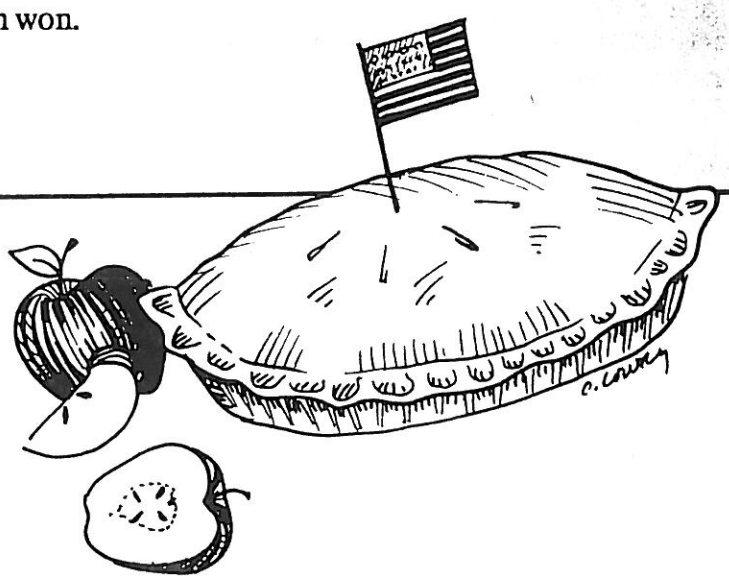
They quickly realized they had two problems: they had to get the legislators' attention on the issue, and they had to prove that more than just baby nurses cared about it.

So they sought out senior citizen groups, got some to agree, and asked that everybody gather on the same day at the state capitol bearing apple pies. After sticking a tiny American flag in every pie, they went together—grandparents and babies' advocates—to visit the legislators. "This is a vote for motherhood and apple pie," they said.

The legislators noticed, and they got the message. This was a group that had linked a sympathetic, babies' need with the voting power of seniors. That's political dynamite.

And it wasn't a one-shot deal. The senior groups knew clearly that this "help" was to be a two-way street; next time the babies' advocates would lobby on an issue of the seniors' choosing. Before long the teams were back again—maternal and child health advocates and senior citizens—only this time the issue was nursing home reform.

Those maternity care advocates didn't have big numbers, but they had the power to help others—and they used it. That way, both their issues and a lot of at-risk children won.



Part IV

NUTS AND BOLTS

You've got your issue, you've put together a committee, you've drawn up your strategy (ready to be revised as needed), you've reminded yourself how the process works.

Now it's time for the practical details, the nuts and bolts of serious policy advocacy: building coalitions, testifying, lobbying, becoming part of the process.

Take a deep breath. Here we go.

BUILDING COALITIONS, BROADENING YOUR BASE

The most obvious reason for building a coalition is to increase your numbers. But there is a subtler reason as well. Life often feels hectic, disjointed, too busy. Modern communities are full of families with busy lives and no close relatives living near by. That proves especially hard when tragedy or trouble strikes. It also takes a toll on the neighbors and friends who would like to help but aren't sure how to get involved.

Coalitions offer a way. They can provide a means for communities to come together, to learn about common problems, and set some priorities for services of mutual benefit to everyone. And because they represent bigger numbers, there are more people to share the work. One small group, or working people with limited time to give, won't have to do everything.

Coalitions are particularly well-suited to advocacy strategies. They show a commitment to think ahead, anticipate alternatives, and achieve political results.

State and local coalitions:

- Combine community resources,
- Offer a forum for thinking about community problems,
- Reduce competition for funding and volunteer time,
- Provide an efficient way to work with community agencies,
- Offer support and expertise to small groups, as well as a network for families with special needs.

By working through coalitions, your group can do more than you could do on your own. Three steps will get you started.

Identify a Convener and Likely Coalition Members

You may want to be the convener, calling others to join in with you, or you might consider whether there are other groups with more experience, community standing, or staff (for setting up meetings, keeping notes) who would be better suited to the role.

Whether you wish to convene the group, or persuade someone else to, you'll want to have a list of likely coalition members in hand. Think of everyone with an obvious interest in the issue at hand, and then try to add groups that aren't so obvious. It helps if from the outset, your list of coalition members suggests breadth as well as self-interest – like maternity care advocates plus senior citizens, or the Florida police who linked up with after-school care advocates because children in organized programs are less likely to get in trouble with the police. (Their slogan: *Cops Care for After-School Care.*)

Select a Good Issue.

Some issues are too narrow (or too localized) to warrant a coalition, and you don't want to get a reputation for calling for coalitions anytime you can't handle a job. But anything that affects the community at large (environmental hazards, Medicaid eligibility limits, boarder babies, whether food is taxed) might be a good issue for a coalition.

Call an Organizing Meeting to Set a Goal.

If you think you've got a good issue, and you want to see community agencies work together to resolve it, try the idea out on some key community players and invite them to join you at a brown bag/brain-storming lunch. You'll quickly discover whether there is enough interest in your issue – or whether there is something else on which you can all agree to work.

THE OTHER SIDE

Despite the many benefits of working together in coalitions, some groups hesitate to join. ***Drawbacks include:***

- Logistics become more complicated. It is hard enough to set up a meeting with six people you know; convening a meeting of thirty organizations, some of whom you know only by name or reputation, is much harder.
- Getting agreement is harder, e.g. on who votes, who takes responsibility for what, and matters of style.
- Credit, as well as blame, gets shared. Your group won't get as much visibility, and if some members of the coalition behave badly, all may be tarnished. There is also the fear (unfounded) that everyone in a coalition has to agree with everything every member says or does.
- Decision-making must be shared. Some organizations have by-laws or Board structures that make it hard to submit to group decision-making.

Happily, there are good answers to most of the above. For example:

- Responsibility for logistical support can rotate among groups.
- "Key Contact" lists can identify decision-makers from key groups who can speak for their members on short notice, and can quickly disseminate information throughout their networks.

- It is possible to set up a time-limited, single-issue "campaign" rather than an on-going, multi-issue "coalition."
- Endorsements can be structured so that member groups can opt in or out provision-by-provision. Or participants can agree that for purposes of a particular campaign, every group on the list will promise not to work AGAINST any other group on the list. They don't have to work FOR what someone else wants, they just won't allow the politicians to pit one against another for now. (This device has occasionally even enabled pro-life and pro-choice groups to work together in coalitions.)

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Whether an issue gets the attention of the politicians may depend on whether it has the attention of the media.

Child care standards are a good example. They got very little attention until some dramatic stories turned up in the media of children harmed while in unregulated care. That drew attention to the issue, and also gave worried parents a forum in which to express their concerns. Legislative hearings followed, as did many more state laws requiring that basic health and safety standards be met by child care providers.

There are so many issues competing for the attention of decision-makers, that good advocates need to work with the media to get action. That's not as hard as you may think.

The Federal Communications Commission requires broadcasters to solicit the views of the community, something usually done at sessions known as "ascertainments." Normally the broadcasters invite in a variety of individuals to speak for the community. But you can call or write and ask to be included in the next ascertainment – that gives you an opportunity to educate the media and encourage better coverage of your issue.

The Media Include:

- Newspapers, magazines, newsletters (including those put out by your church or any groups you belong to);
- Television (news, features, and Public Service Announcements – PSA's);
- Radio stations (especially news, features, talk shows, and PSA's).

Ultimately, "the media" are just individuals, including people you know. If you watch for the names at the top of news stories and regular columns on issues you care about, and listen for the names of the producers and editors of any radio shows that might be interested – then you can ask for them by name. If you can't get an individual's name, use a title. "Assignment editor" is one that will often get you the right person, or "Producer". You need to get your issue known and talked about as much as possible, and the media are your route to that end.

It helps to realize that the media are like most institutions: white men still hold most of the high-ranking positions, so they get the preferred, day-time hours. On the weekends, women and minorities tend to be in charge. If your story is rejected by the regular assignment editor, try again on the weekend – you may get a different response.

Effective Media Work Includes:

1. Learning how to write a press release.

2. Making calls directly to news organizations.

3. Establishing a relationship with reporters who cover social issues.

4. Observing deadlines (don't call a tv station at 4:00 p.m. with an item for the 6:00 p.m. news; don't bother radio reporters just before airtime; give everybody plenty of "lead" time for a complicated story).

5. Considering their needs (tv shows need something to film; radio shows need something understandable through sound; newspapers are more likely to use numbers and to do interviews by phone).

6. Being accurate (you won't get trusted as a source, or called a second time, if you feed reporters unchecked or shaky information).

The advocacy community itself is a good resource when it comes to working with the media. Some have publications to help members present particular issues to the media (like the Child Welfare League of America's booklet called "How To Speak T.V."), or workshops and role-playing sessions on how to deal with the media. Sometimes national advocacy groups try to help local advocates win media attention—as when the Food Research and Action Center sent local hunger advocates advance copies of a report on childhood hunger, and worked with them to set up local press conferences pegged to the release of the national data. In that way, advocates all across the country were ready when network affiliates and local newspapers wanted a local angle on the national story, and the media coverage was better than it would have been. (State-level advocates can use the same approach with their local affiliates, to get better state-wide coverage.)

Don't Forget

As intimidating as the idea of working with the media may seem at the outset, you are media consumers. That means you can invite someone from the local media to explain to your group how they work. Remember also that they're always looking for good stories, and you may have one.

One word of warning: never say anything to a member of the working press that you wouldn't want to see, attributed to you, in the news the next day.

TECHNIQUES FOR THE POLITICALLY SHY

Across the country, community groups have been developing their own, easily-adapted ways of influencing policies. Often they serve more than one end. Below are some examples of techniques that can be used.

For those who are just getting started, or trying to get other advocacy neophytes involved, it helps if the advocacy effort is

Easy Fun Low cost

&

Able to attract the media.

Calendars

A child advocacy group in Topeka, Kansas wanted to be sure their legislators knew the basic facts about Kansas children, so they made up a Calendar with 1 page for each of the 12 weeks in the legislative session. On the days of the week they entered the birthdays of the legislators, and in place of the usual pretty picture, they put a "fact of the week" about Kansas children. Everyone enjoyed displaying the calendars (to advertise their birthdays), and along the way a lot of legislators, lobbyists, and staff learned *12 key facts*

about Kansas children. Subsequent calendars have included the baby pictures of the Governor and various legislators, and were sold to raise money for the group.

Calendars can be developed for any issue, in any state, and the volunteers who compile the legislators' birth dates get a non-threatening experience in calling a legislator's office.

Educational Petitions

Advocates for the hungry and homeless in Phoenix used their annual Christmas fund drive to gather names on a petition. Every time a donation was made, the donor was asked to also sign their petition. It read something like, "We the undersigned are doing our part to meet food and shelter needs in our community. Now we are calling on our legislators at all levels to do their part and adequately fund the programs to help vulnerable people." They made the point that charity alone is not enough in a way that educated the voting public, and sent a message to their elected officials.

Combine Post-Cards with "Runs"

A common way to raise money for local services is to get pledges for every mile someone walks or runs. A group in Milwaukee used one such occasion for a little lobbying. At the rest stops they had post-cards, and the names and addresses of local legislators. Anyone stopping for juice or water could also write a quick note in support of the object of the run. The group in charge got the names and addresses of those who wrote cards (individuals who may be interested in taking a next step), as well as a possible media story.

TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING WITH POLICY-MAKERS

When you are ready to deal directly with policy-makers, the same general rules apply. Whenever possible make it: easy to do, low cost, and enjoyable for people to participate.

But also:

Be informed ***Be concise***

&

Be clear about what you want.

Don't be embarrassed – as a citizen and advocate, your job is to ask; their job is to be asked. And don't be intimidated – if you don't know an answer, just say so and promise to get back with the correct information.

Tuesdays on the Hill

The Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches wanted to make it easier and more comfortable for congregants to come and lobby their state legislators. They couldn't eliminate the distance or time involved (two major barriers), but they could eliminate the other reasons people stay away: feeling inexperienced, or uninformed.

Through church bulletins they advertised that anyone who wished to lobby on social justice issues could come on Tuesday mornings, about two hours before the legislature began. The time would be used to make people smart: do briefings, explain bills, provide fact sheets, and answer questions.

They also did something very smart: ***they paired those who'd never lobbied before with an experienced "buddy."*** First-timers didn't need to say anything unless they wanted to; just being there would make a contribution. After tagging along with a more experienced person a few times, almost anyone feels competent to

lobby on their own – and even take someone else who is less experienced.

Anything can be intimidating if it's never been tried before. Letting newcomers tag along and watch the veterans has enormous value. It's something all good teachers (coaches, trainers, bosses, parents) understand: children learn by example; medical students learn by observing; old farmers show young farmers how to operate the machines. Policy advocacy is no different. It's possible to read a book and just plunge in, but watching someone more experienced the first time or two makes learning so much easier.

Legislators as Moderators, or Panelists

If you already know your legislators' positions, but wish they knew more about yours, there are several models to draw from.

A human services coalition in Connecticut invites key legislators to moderate panels (not as speakers), and uses the panelists for what amounts to a *seminar* for the legislator. (This is well-suited to explaining some complex community issue not easily summarized in a fact sheet.)

A South Carolina group used the workshop period of their annual conference to hold "mini-hearings" at which their members were the witnesses, and key legislators were the moderators. The legislators gave tips on what makes for good testimony, the participants got a brief (three minute) exposure to testifying, and everyone learned from each other – including the legislators who were, in effect, being lobbied. (This same device could be used in inviting a legislator to a university class, or to a group's membership meeting.)

In North Carolina, a mental health organization used the workshop sessions at their annual conference for specially-constructed panels. Each panel consisted of three consumers of state services, plus two legislators and a moderator. Among the consumers was the parent of a severely retarded child, a recovering alcoholic, and someone with a mental illness. The legislators learned firsthand how the laws were being implemented, and also got a glimpse of needed changes. It was another effective way to use a conference workshop session to lobby.

Announce a "Call-in Day"

Often the people you'd like to involve as advocates can't get to the state capitol or a meeting with their legislators. That might apply to anyone with a limited income, demanding job, physical handicap, or troubled child. But it is very important that their voices be heard, and "call-in days" are one way to make that possible.

Texas groups representing the disabled used their newsletters to announce that the day after a "Lobby Day at the Capitol" would be a "Call-In Day." Everyone was urged to make three phone calls: to the Governor, their legislators, and the Speaker of the House. A sample "script" was provided. That way, members of the legislature spent one day in personal visits from those who could get to the Capitol, and another day on their phones with calls from those who couldn't visit personally. It was doubly-effective without being twice as costly.

During federal budget-writing time in 1991, the Citizen's Budget Campaign used national call-in days to involve more citizens in the federal budget process, especially on behalf of pressing human needs.

Send Thank-You Notes

Politicians deserve to be thanked for policies that work and budget decisions that

help make a difference. And, they're likely to remember those who thank them.

A multi-purpose social agency in Northern Wisconsin encourages the beneficiaries of one program each month to write thank-you notes to the legislators who determine their fate. In mid-winter the recipients of energy assistance write and in summer the youth in summer jobs write. Twelve times a year the legislators learn about the consequences of their votes, as well as good reasons to support the programs again.

Reward Good Government Action

If policy makers only hear from those who want less government, they'll think cutting back is always the best response. Advocates can help provide another perspective.

In North Carolina, the Child Advocacy Institute gives awards to the counties that do the best job of serving eligible children. Counties with the best records in reaching the most WIC-eligible, AFDC-eligible, and prenatal care-eligible mothers and children get honored at their annual conference. Program administrators, media representatives, and local elected officials come from the winning counties, along with a five-minute slide show presentation of their winning techniques. That sends a powerful message to officials and voters alike about the value of the programs.

Compile Success Stories

Politicians can't afford to be identified only with losing causes, which is how social programs often are regarded.

In Chicago, the Public Welfare Coalition is compiling a book full of welfare "success stories" – real families who have been helped by the welfare system and are leading productive lives.

Similar success stories could be compiled about former offenders or teen parents, about the victims of sexual abuse, or of former addicts who are now doing all right. *Success stories carry a powerful message that "at risk" does not mean "doomed."*

Stories like these can be used to great effect on lobbying visits or when making presentations in the community (for example, before the local American Association of University Women or Chamber of Commerce). It isn't enough to try and scare policy-makers and policy-influencers with grim statistics, they need some proof that what you are asking for works. It's that "cocktail of fear and hope" that prompts action, and hope comes in the form of evidence that we can make a difference.

Moral: As each example illustrates once again, advocacy is as much a frame of mind as it is a set of skills or knowledge. Advocates have a way of seeing opportunities and using them to get important social issues before the policy-makers and their staffs.

But working directly with legislators and policy makers is only one part of the job to be done. Getting the attention and understanding of the voters is the other. Good advocates are always seeking ways, large and small, to do both. They use information, fear, guilt, whatever helps...along with the evidence that what they are asking for works.

Policy analyst Steven Kelman says that political decisions "are the collective choices of people who disagree. Behind them stands the power of government." It is up to us to shape those "collective choices" behind which our government stands.

LAUNCHING A PAPER PLATE CAMPAIGN

When the booming community of Naperville, Illinois, found itself with growing numbers of hungry children, a handful of women from a local church decided to act. Working with more imagination than money, they found a particularly effective way to convey their concern: their messages were written on paper plates.

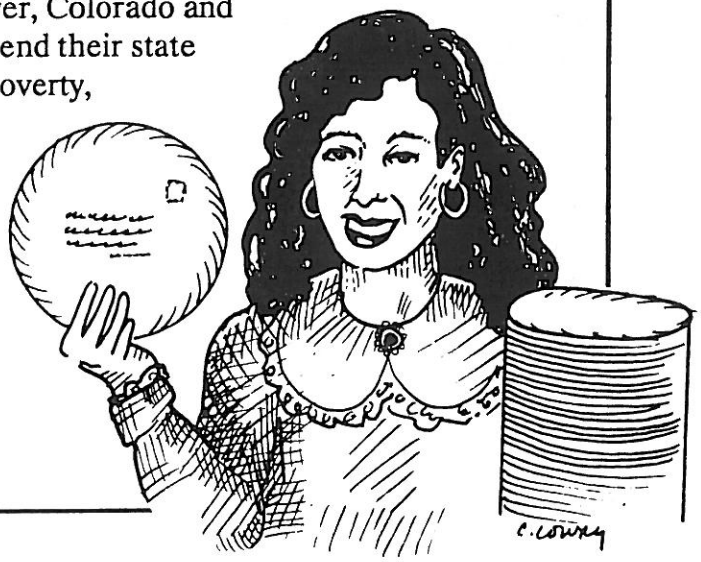
Before very long, it was clear that this "paper plate campaign" was going to be a smash hit. It proved to be inexpensive (they found it best to use the cheap, flimsy plates, not the kind you would put food on), and easy to organize (they just brought stacks of paper plates and plenty of stamps—39c postage per plate—to gatherings large and small); and, from beginning to end, they had fun.

Many people hesitate to write a formal letter to a legislator, but nobody worries about writing deathless prose on a paper plate. Even people who'd never written to a legislator in their lives got involved—using colored pens, letting their children draw pictures on the plates, writing large or small. It was the only time, one of the women said, that she ever got calls from strangers who wanted to be involved in their advocacy effort—and all because it "sounded like so much fun."

The effort got more than the usual share of attention. Staff who are accustomed to ordinary letters found the paper plates impossible to ignore. A story in the Washington POST mentioned the paper plates. One day even a woman from the White House called: they too had noticed the Naperville plates.

Equally important, they got written up in the local press—which attracted still more participants, spread the word to more of the voting public, and was a great boost to everyone's morale.

Since then, college students in Denver, Colorado and Provo, Utah have used paper plates to send their state legislators a message about childhood poverty, and a group of Ohio senior citizens has used the paper covers from the "meals-on-wheels" trays to carry their messages of support for senior nutrition programs (the possibilities may be endless). Anything out of the ordinary, that grabs attention and conveys your message, would work.



Part V

FRINGE BENEFITS OF POLICY ADVOCACY

New advocacy groups are springing up everywhere, and broad coalitions of existing organizations are taking on a wide range of issues important to their communities. They are educating the public and their own members, working with the media and lobbying their elected officials. And they are winning victories large and small: preventing cuts in services, changing laws and budgets, influencing public agendas.

The 101st Congress alone: enacted national child care legislation, expanded medicaid, extended the protections of the Civil Rights Act to people with disabilities, increased funding for domestic violence services and low-cost housing, improved the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-earning families, improved services for the mentally ill, and more. That list is worth noting because: none of it happened by accident, and all of it happened with the help and support of advocates in communities of every size. Similar lists could be compiled for state governments nationwide. Those lists of legislative accomplishment are among the direct results of policy advocacy.

But something else is happening at the same time. Groups that began with a handful of discouraged people now boast hundreds or thousands. Those who got involved speak of feeling "energized," where before they spoke of feeling "burned out." And they radiate an excitement that is positively contagious.

It isn't because these are all super-men and super-women, but because advocacy can have that effect. These are ordinary people who've seen a need and figured out some way to try and meet it; in the process they (and the groups they belong to) are being changed. Advocacy has benefits that go far beyond the achievement of immediate goals.

Benefits to the Individuals

If your group wants public hearings before the county decides whether or not to build a new nursing home, for example, that has a relatively short time-frame as well as a very clear conclusion.

Moreover, that is something which might be accomplished in a very low-key manner – for example, by having individuals in your group make phone calls to county commissioners they know. In cases like this, your group may not get any experience mounting a large-scale letter-writing and lobbying cam-

paign, or working with the local media, but they will learn about low-key advocacy techniques.

The obvious way to judge that effort is in relation to **the goal:** did you succeed in getting public hearings held before a decision was made?

But another way to judge an advocacy effort is in relation to **its effect on the people involved** in the effort. Even a losing effort can teach valuable lessons, including:

- How to think strategically,
- How to come to joint decisions,
- Who in your group has ties to community leaders.

You – and everyone involved in your effort – will also have learned what it means to be active participants in a decision, not just passive objects of decisions made by somebody else. If you are concerned with human dignity, that last point is particularly important.

That's why **empowerment** is a word so often used in describing the benefits of advocacy. It is far more empowering to be one of those who decides, than one of those being "decided for." That is especially true for anyone who is directly affected. If your group includes families with an ill or troubled member, or single parents who are feeling overwhelmed, being able to influence whether there are services available will leave them feeling less like pawns.

Morale is another fringe benefit of advocacy. Those who work in direct service often speak of being burned out, particularly when need is rising faster than donations, budgets, or volunteers.

They, not the politicians, must turn away troubled people when the services, money, or staff have been exhausted. Seeing others in need, day after day, while feeling powerless to help, takes a toll that can be physical as well as psychological. An advocacy effort to protect a service, increase a budget, or win better policies can be a helpful antidote to burnout.

Attacking root causes is also a benefit of advocacy. More than most, direct service workers (paid and volunteer) understand that more shelters won't end homelessness, and more volunteers are no substitute for decent wages or a way to pay the doctor. Hungry children can't eat "a thousand points of light."

Understanding that and not knowing how to change it is demoralizing. So is the sense of wanting to *do something,* anything, even if it isn't the answer. Both are among the reasons there is so much staff and volunteer turn-over in the helping professions: it is debilitating to wage a hopeless, ineffective war.

Advocacy offers an opportunity to change that.

Think what it would mean to be able to fight underlying causes, to make things better for tens or thousands at a time, to deal with what Raul Yzaguirre, the president of La Raza, calls "a growing poverty of the spirit." Think how much more efficient, more effective, and more energizing it would be to know you wouldn't have to fight the same battle over and over again.

With advocacy, that happens. Staff that were over-whelmed and under-funded get to work for changes that will make their jobs more manageable and help more people – all at the same time. Working to fix a bad system is far more satisfying than working to patch up the mistakes after-the-fact, one frantic person at a time.

Benefits To The Organization

Whenever an advocacy effort is undertaken in the name of a sponsoring group, the benefits accrue to more than just the individuals involved, in the same way that a small committee may be responsible for a fund-raiser but everyone in the group benefits from the money they bring in.

It helps develop true constituencies

Sometimes a handful of vocal people become an issue's spokespeople by default. A good advocacy effort changes that.

By seeking out the views of those being spoken for, it helps develop constituencies – those affected by the issue as well as potential supporters and their organizations – and gives them a voice. And if the advocacy effort is managed with integrity, your organization will become more accountable to those you speak for, as well as less easily dominated by a vocal few.

It helps build organizational structures

Nothing complex can be carried out without policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, methods and mechanisms, all carefully spelled out and assigned. Your group will learn just by deciding on its own structure: should the lead Committee be big or small? the campaign short-term or long-term? the procedures formal or informal?

Working out those practical questions and living by the decisions builds organizations.

It is a way to identify and develop new leadership

The very fact that a new effort is about to be undertaken will interest those who've taken on leadership roles in the past.

But it is also likely to attract the involvement of some who have been invisible before, and among them will be potential new leaders – old and young – with previously unrecognized talents. Developing new leadership pays off many times over, for everything your group hopes to accomplish (including attracting new members), and not just the immediate issue.

Advocacy efforts help to educate the public

They provide natural opportunities to educate yourselves, your group, and others about the policy process and the unmet needs of your community.

Because advocacy efforts tend to have high public visibility, they also offer opportunities to educate the larger community about your organization's perspective on important community issues, as well as your role in dealing with them. In that sense it is a form of advertising, or outreach.

People in need of services will learn what you provide, as will many who may have been unaware of your group's existence.

Advocacy efforts help establish (or improve) relations with a broad range of community leaders

To be successful, you will need to identify and become known to a variety of community leaders. You may begin by wanting those relationships in order to advance specific elements of your advocacy campaign, but having established relationships with elected officials and the heads of various community institutions and groups, they may be called upon for other purposes as well.

Benefits to the Process

In the normal course of events, public policies are more likely to reflect immediate concerns over cost and efficiency than long-range concerns over what we all need for a

better future. But it is almost impossible to devise well-rounded policies if the people most concerned about others refuse to get involved.

Think who is most likely to have a voice in the policy-making process and what their priorities are likely to be, and you will understand why you need to get involved.

In a participatory democracy, a policy debate reflects what the participants bring to it. So, if those who care about the broader community and not just their own narrow self-interest opt out of the process, policy-makers lose the benefit of their perspective.

The same point applies to the perspective of direct service providers. We don't want doctors prescribing treatment without ever seeing a patient; or lawyers deciding what to plead without talking to their clients. Neither should we adopt policies about public health and social services without hearing from those who provide and receive them. A 24-year-old staff aide working for a legislator from a wealthy suburb, may not fully appreciate what life is like for a single parent with a chronically-ill child, low wages, and no health coverage.

People who work in direct service can help be their voices, the voices of those whom the laws are most likely to affect. They can be their surrogates on occasion, the eyes-and-ears of the policy process on others, and all of the time they can bring valuable insights into a process that might otherwise be dictated by media interests and big campaign contributors. When those who understand first-hand refuse to become involved, the entire process is poorer for it.

Benefits To Society

Occasionally it seems as though advocacy is just a high-stakes, fast-paced, adrenalin-pumping, hard-ball game that is played to be won.

It is all that, and it is also much more. Health and social policies affect all of our lives and the lives of our communities in countless ways every day. They determine who will get care and on what terms; they help determine who lives and who dies; they determine whether families will go hopelessly in debt to get care for a troubled family member. Public policies even help determine whether our communities are more divided or united.

But advocacy is not only about winning, and a sense of community does not depend solely on victories. Sometimes advocacy efforts are important to take on even when the odds seem hopelessly stacked against any possibility of success. Five are worth noting:

1. When it is what your constituency wants.

As advocates you have to use your best judgement about when to proceed and when to use your resources, but you also have an obligation to respond to your constituents. They may want something you regard as unrealistic, but one of your jobs is to convey what your constituents want and feel they need. And sometimes you may just win—as the group in Washington state did in responding to the plea for help with dental care.

2. When it serves to educate the public.

Advocates often think in terms of two and three-year plans, with the first year presumed to be just for public education and no expectation of early political action. But you can't get political action on a non-issue. Public consciousness has to be raised; the media and public have to be educated. That cannot occur in a vacuum. Framing an advocacy issue and developing a campaign (e.g. getting a legislator to introduce a bill, or setting out three

A PERSONAL NOTE

Advocacy is a public undertaking, but at some level it is also a very personal matter. Most of us are advocates because we wouldn't know how not to be. We are offended by some issue or injustice (poverty, hunger, child abuse, prejudice) and feel the need to act. It is what Martin Luther King meant when he said we should be "mal-adjusted" to injustice and the suffering of others.

That translates differently for every advocate, but for me, being an advocate includes some very basic tasks.

The first is *to make the case for the need.* Others can be counted on to sound a note of caution or to ask for what is likely to win. It falls to the advocates to make the case for what is needed. But even modest steps should be taken in light of what remains to be done. Casper Weinberger (architect of the Reagan military build-up) understood. My job, he'd say to Congress, is to tell you what my programs and my people need; your job is to figure out how to pay for it. Advocates for cleaner water, homeless families, or troubled children should do no less.

An advocate's second task is also clear: *push the limits of the debate.* Policy debates and budget fights have a way of getting bogged down over details, and settling for what's easiest to get done. Myles Horton, a founder of the Highlander Folk School that trained much of the leadership of the civil rights movement, said: "you have to build a program that will deal with things as they are now and as they ought to be ....to be effective is to do the 'is' and the 'ought' at the same time."

Task number three: *be visionary, be bold.* Practical steps will have to be taken along the way, but advocates must have a longer view. Once upon a time ending slavery seemed impossible; so did establishing social security or extending the vote to women. Great progress is only possible with great vision.

Finally: *stay of good cheer.* It is all right to take a rest, find a new way of working, or slip into the background for a while, but so long as others are in need it will never be all right to give up. Besides, when you win, the whole society—including its most vulnerable members—wins, and that makes everything worthwhile.

demands) will sharpen the topic and give focus to any education efforts.

3. To build membership or rally demoralized troops.

It is much easier to organize people for a specific goal than for some generalized, hypothetical issue. Developing an advocacy campaign can energize old members and attract new ones.

4. When the group affected is socially isolated.

Mentally retarded or HIV-infected individuals don't normally carry as much weight in our political system as millionaires or trade

associations, but their interests should be just as vigorously defended, just as competently represented. Advocacy can do that, while sending a powerful signal that somebody cares.

5. When morality demands it; whenever there is injustice.

Fighting apartheid often seemed hopeless but it was the right thing to do. If there are people in your community who go without care because of deeply-held prejudices (because they are Black or Hispanic, or disabled, or poor) it would be wrong *not* to do battle on their behalf, no matter how unlikely the chances of success.

In our democracy, public policies are a direct reflection of those who choose to get involved. Just as corporate farmers tend to shape agriculture policies and defense contractors influence military procurement policies, so are the policies affecting troubled people shaped by those who choose to get involved.

Never forget: policies will be adopted with us or without us; the choice is ours. Happily, whole communities benefit when we get involved, or suffer when we do not. Advocates have no guarantee of victory, but when we do win—well, there's just nothing sweeter.

Jane Addams—who helped immigrant families with everything from literacy classes to child care and hot baths, who served on the school board, fought for women's suffrage, and won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1931—understood better than most why each of us must act. She said:

> ***Nothing could be worse than the fear that one has given up too soon and left one effort unexpended which might have saved the world.***

APPENDIX

POLICY ADVOCAY: THE TEN MINUTE VERSION, by Nancy Amidei

IRS RULES SAY NONPROFITS CAN LOBBY, by Gary Bass

WHAT IS ADVOCACY AND WHY FUND IT?, by Patricia Bauman

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Please Note: The material in this Appendix was designed to be copied and used. The first is a simple, two-page description of policy advocacy that you can copy for use as a handout at meetings or advocacy workshops. Similarly, you may wish to make copies of the description of how the IRS rules allow lobbying by nonprofit organizations. Or, you may want to make copies of foundation-director Patricia Bauman's article urging foundations and grant-makers to support advocacy.

And finally, you may find it helpful to have copies of the list of useful resources with you—but be sure to add items of particular interest to your constituency to the more general items here.

POLICY ADVOCACY: The Ten Minute Version

By Nancy Amidei

If you have ever:

Gone to bat for your child when there was a problem at school;

Helped a relative or neighbor get care when they were sick; or

Asked friends to support a favorite project—

then you have been an **advocate.**

Advocacy means to *speak up*, to *plead the case of another*, or to *champion a cause*. Usually advocacy involves bringing influence to bear to win change. It is something most of us do routinely on behalf of ourselves, our families, our neighbors, and our friends.

Policy advocacy is no different, except that the advocacy may be on behalf of people we don't personally know, and those being influenced work with laws, public programs, or court decisions. That includes anyone in a public policy-making role (like a county commissioner, state legislator, or government employee).

Policy advocacy can be useful at all levels of government. For example, if you have a family member with a mental or physical disability, policies at federal, state, and local levels already affect your lives:

- **Local school boards** must carry out the federal law that requires an Individualized Education Plan for handicapped children;
- **County government** is usually responsible for such social services as sheltered workshops and adult day care;
- **City government** is likely to be responsible for whether or not buses, roadways, and public buildings are accessible to wheelchairs;
- **State government** determines the income eligibility limits for Medicaid; and
- **The federal government** is responsible for protecting the civil rights of people with disabilities.

One way or another, legislators, government agencies, and the courts all affect whether people with disabilities and their families can live full and productive lives. But sometimes it takes the help of an advocate to make everything work as it should.

If you want to make a positive difference for vulnerable people in your community, then you will need to take three steps.

1 **Be informed.** This part is obvious. It doesn't help to be well-meaning but misinformed. Getting the basic facts is the first step, and not very hard.

Get on the mailing list of an advocacy group that focuses on your issue. If you are concerned about the need for child care in your community, you could get on the mailing list of a national or a local child advocacy group, and go to public meetings where child care needs are discussed. Local advocates can direct you to reports on the subject, and you could follow the issue in the media. Before long, you'll know a lot about child care.

2 **Be involved.** This step is also pretty obvious, and one that most people take almost instinctively. It makes sense to want to act once you know the need.

Here too there are many possibilities. You could volunteer at a Head Start program, attend a conference, or answer telephone inquiries at a Resource and Referral line. Others help by babysitting for the children of homeless families while their parents are out looking for housing or work.

Taking steps one and two will help alleviate some immediate problems. That is a good thing, but the problems will still be there, as will their causes—largely unchanged. Just being informed—without acting—is like going to a restaurant just to read the menu. You'd be informed, but you'd be missing the point. To be effective, one more step is needed.

3 **Be an advocate.** This does not come as easily to most people, but it represents the best hope for getting at why there is a problem in the first place.

Here too there are many choices for action. You could make calls or write letters about child care measures before your state legislature. You could help design and carry out a campaign to educate the voters. You can urge your governor to support adequate child care funding. You can write comment letters when federal regulations affecting child care are revised. In short, you can take steps to insure that there will be real child care choices available to meet the needs in your community.

THREE BASIC TOOLS, TWO CRITICAL AUDIENCES

No matter what the level of government, the nature of the change desired, or the need, there are three basic tools available to every policy advocate and two key audiences. When you want to reach a *policy maker*, you should plan to:

Write • Call • Visit

If policy makers are to represent your wishes in the policy process, they need to hear from you. The fundamentals of contacting policy makers are so reasonable you'll wonder why you haven't done it (or more of it) before.

- Be brief and to the point;
- Identify yourself and how you (or people you know) will be affected by what's being proposed – that is, a new law, a cut in the budget, a change in the rules that govern a program;
- Be clear about what you want. Name the law that's being discussed or the program rules that are about to be changed, and specifically what you want the policy-maker to do.
- Mention provisions that you agree and disagree with, and if possible, offer some alternative.
- Let them know how you can be reached for further information, a clarification, or help.

In addition to reaching policy makers directly, there's a second audience to keep in mind: *other voters*. If enough of them get aroused, they will help make your case and your job will be easier.

The same basic tools apply.

WRITE

With a few minor changes, the letter you send to a legislator can also be sent as a letter-to-the-editor. That way your message may reach many other voters.

CALL

The same message you leave on your Congressperson's message machine can be called in to a radio call-in show. That's another way your message can reach other voters.

VISIT

Or, you can take the "little speech" you memorized to speak to the county commissioner the other day at the mall, and repeat it at your church group, rotary club, or PTA. That's one more way that your message can reach other voters.

BASIC ADVOCACY IS NOT HARD

While it is certainly true that some advocacy is carried out by experts, and may involve super-sophisticated organizations and strategies, there is still much to do that is simple and easy. You don't need to be an expert, you just need to care enough to get involved and speak up. That means bringing whatever power you have – as a taxpayer and voter – to make our democratic system work. Your influence is greater than you think and not hard to use. Just consider:

- Speaking up won't guarantee that you will win, but not speaking up guarantees that your wishes won't be known.
- Advocacy is easier, and frequently more fun, if you are part of a group. (It also helps boost your courage and bolster morale.)
- It helps to go along with someone more experienced the first few times. It won't seem so intimidating, and having someone else do the talking helps a lot. Much of learning involves watching (and imitating) others. Advocacy is no different.
- Don't be afraid of being asked something you can't answer. Many politicians have message machines, so you may just be talking to a machine. And, as one Seante aide explained, her job was to record each caller's name, address, and message – not to put the Senator's constituents on the spot by interrogating them.
- What if you *are* asked something you can't answer? Simple, do as the politicians do: say you don't know, but you'll find out and get back to them. Then do. When Utah Governor Norman Bangerter met with human needs advocates at a "Citizen's Day At The Legislature," there were questions he couldn't answer. He acknowledged the fact and said he'd get back to the group with the answer. You can do the same.
- Don't be afraid of being rejected. As one politician explained, even if he thought your idea was goofy, he'd fudge around or nod rather than say so. Elected officials are not likely to risk losing your vote by telling you off.
- Practice helps. Memorize a little speech, or write out a script to use on the phone. Role play the meeting or call with a friend. And don't worry if you lack the charm of Ronald Reagan or the moral stature of Mother Theresa.

Your only task is to be yourself: a citizen and voter who wants government policies to work for the most vulnerable as well as they do for the most powerful.

This is an exerpt from "So You Want to Make A Difference". For a copy, call (202) 234-8494

IRS Rules Say Nonprofits Can Lobby

(The following article is adapted from a September, 1990 "OMB Watcher" newsletter prepared by Gary D. Bass, Executive Director, OMB Watch.)

After nearly four years of often bitter battling, the IRS issued final rules on lobbying regulations for public charities—rules that represent a major victory for nonprofits.

The new rules, published in the *Federal Register* on August 30, 1990 (page 35579), affect nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations that elect a special lobbying expenditure test, dubbed the "Conable Election" (501(h)). The rules became effective August 30, 1990 for the next full tax year. (See boxes, "What is the Expenditure Test," and "Should We Elect?")

Redefining Grassroots Lobbying

The final rules represent a major turn-around from the rules proposed by the IRS in 1986. The 1986 proposed rules would have redefined most public policy initiatives as "lobbying." Worse, they would have forced nonprofits to count such lobbying expenditures as "grassroots" lobbying as opposed to "direct" lobbying. This would have even more severely curtailed nonprofit initiatives. (See box, "Lobbying Ceilings".)

The final rules are quite different. To be counted as grassroots lobbying, the communication must meet a three-part test:

- Refer to specific legislation or confirmation of executive branch nominees;
- Reflect a view on that legislation;

What is the Expenditure Test?

Prior to 1976, nonprofit organizations faced enormous ambiguity over how much lobbying was permitted. Those who lobbied more than an "insubstantial" amount faced a possible loss of tax-exempt status and the right to receive tax-deductible charitable contributions. Unfortunately, this "insubstantial part test" was never uniformly defined. Depending on the IRS auditor, "substantial" lobbying could mean anything from 2% to 33% of an organization's budget.

In 1976, a coalition of public charities worked with Rep. Barber Conable (R-NY) to pass legislation that attempted to: (a) make clear that public charities were encouraged to lobby; (b) guarantee that certain activities would not be considered lobbying (such as nonpartisan analysis of legislative issues, discussion of broad policy issues which require legislative solutions, responding to requests from legislative bodies, communications with membership about legislative matters as long as it does not urge action by members, and self-defense lobbying to protect an organization's existence, tax exempt status, and more); and (c) clarify how much money could be spent for lobbying purposes.

Passed under sections 501(h) and 4911 of the Tax Reform Act of 1976, and later dubbed the Conable Election, the provisions allowed 501(c)(3) organizations to elect to spend up to a certain percentage of their "exempt purpose expenditures" for lobbying without incurring tax or loss of tax-exempt status.

Under the Conable Election, the organization would face an "expenditure test" (instead of the "insubstantial part test") where specific dollar limits on the organization's lobbying expenditures apply. Furthermore, where the substantial part test applied to an organization's lobbying activities, the expenditure test only applied to an organization's *expenditures* for those lobbying activities. Thus, under the insubstantial part test, the activities of volunteers may be included as lobbying, but would not be under the expenditure test, unless of course expenditures were involved in the lobbying activities of volunteers.

Despite the obvious favorable advantages of the expenditure test, few public charities chose the Conable Election. Many were fearful that such election would subject them to greater scrutiny and audit by the IRS. Additionally, the IRS had not issued regulations interpreting how it would carry out the expenditure test.

It took until 1986 for the IRS to propose regulations on lobbying for those organizations electing under 501(h)—proposed regulations best described as draconian.

The final rules published on August 30, 1990 change all that. 501(c)(3) nonprofits who can elect under 501(h) may want to consider doing so. For most situations, the benefits of the expenditure test now outweigh the insubstantial part test.

Lobbying Ceilings Under the Expenditure Test

The 1976 Tax Reform Act created an opportunity for public charities to use specific percentages of their "exempt purpose expenditures" for lobbying. This includes payments for all activities except investment management, unrelated businesses, and certain fund raising costs.

The Act divides lobbying into two categories—"direct" and "grassroots." Direct lobbying refers to communications directly with legislators and their staffs, executive branch employees who may influence legislation, and legislators when there is a call to action. Grassroots lobbying refers to influencing legislation through communications with the general public.

As the chart below indicates, the law permits greater expenditures for direct lobbying than for grassroots lobbying. For example, an organization with exempt purpose expenditures of less than $500,000 can spend up to $100,000 on lobbying, but only $25,000 of the lobbying money can be spent on grassroots lobbying.

Lobbying Ceilings Under the Expenditure Test

Exempt Purpose Expenditures	*Total Lobbying*	*Grassroots Lobbying*
Up to $500,000	20%	5%
$500,000 to $1,000,000	$100,000 + 15% of excess over $500,000	$25,000 + 3.75% of excess over $500,000
$1 million to $1.5 million	$175,000 + 10% of excess over $1 million	$43,750 + 2.5% of excess over $1 million
$1.5 million to $17 million	$225,000 + 5% of excess over $1.5 million	$56,250 + 1.25% of excess over $1.5 million
Over $17 million	$1 million	$250,000

- Encourage a "call to action" with respect to that legislation.

To be regarded as a "call to action," the communication must either:

1. State that the recipient should contact legislators;
2. State a legislator's address, phone number, etc.;
3. Provide a petition, tear-off postcard or similar material for the recipient to send to a legislator; or
4. Specifically identify one or more legislators who will vote on the legislation as: holding an opposing view on the legislation, being undecided about the legislation, being the recipient's representative in the legislature, or being a member of the legislative committee considering the legislation.

Subsequent Use

The 1986 proposed rules would have regarded nonlobbying communications or materials as lobbying expenditures when subsequently used in a lobbying effort.

According to the final rules, nonlobbying materials can later be counted as grassroots lobbying expenditures only if:

1. The primary purpose of the organization in preparing the materials was for use in lobbying; or
2. There is "clear and convincing" evidence of collusion or cooperation between two (or more) unrelated organizations to use the material for lobbying purposes.

Furthermore, the final rules set a time limit on the "subsequent use" rule so it only applies to lobbying expenditures made within six months of the nonlobbying expense. And it does not apply to assemblages, presentation of raw data or preliminary research results.

Finally, the determination of subsequent use is tested against a nonprofit's own normal pattern of distribution, as well as the patterns of similar organizations. Thus, if the organization follows its normal pattern in distributing nonpartisan research, the subsequent use provisions would not apply.

Two Standards

In short, 501(c)(3) public charities may choose one of two standards to be covered by in determining how much lobbying is permissible. (See boxes, "What is the

Should We Elect Under Section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code?

Most 501(c)(3) organizations, except church and church-related charities, are eligible to elect to make limited expenditures to influence legislation under sections 501(h) and 4911 of the Tax Reform Act of 1976. There are four good reasons to do so now.

1. Final rules on lobbying expenditures have now been published. By all accounts, they are quite favorable to the nonprofit community.
2. If you do not elect, your organization is covered by the insubstantial part test, where there is enormous ambiguity regarding what's considered "substantial."
3. Under the insubstantial part test, all lobbying *activities* are counted, whereas under the expenditure test all lobbying *expenditures* are counted. As an example, the use of volunteers (assuming no payments were made) would be counted under the substantial part test, but not under the expenditure test.
4. IRS has assured public charities that nonprofits electing now would not be subject to increased audits.

Nonetheless, electing is not the best choice for every organization. For example, nonprofits that mostly engage in grassroots, rather than direct, lobbying may want to consider whether they should elect.

How Do We Elect?

Contact the IRS and ask for Form 5768, "Election/Revocation of Election by an Eligible Section 501(c)(3) Organization to Make Expenditures to Influence Legislation." The form is very easy to complete, requiring only the ending date of the taxable year to which the election applies. The form must be signed by an officer or trustee of the organization.

Expenditure Test?" and "Should We Elect....") The first standard, known as the "insubstantial part test," has the advantage of being more general, but the IRS has never defined what *substantial part* means, and it includes such factors as the role of the Board and volunteers, regardless of cost.

Or an organization may "elect" to be covered by the standard known as the "expenditure test." That requires keeping track of lobbying expenses, but it has the advantage of providing clear limits on the amount that a nonprofit may spend to influence legislation, and does not include such factors as the actions of volunteers. Violations of the expenditure test result in tax penalties; only under extreme situations would a nonprofit lose its tax exempt status.

In the past, most nonprofits chose the insubstantial part test. But now that the new rules have been finalized—and are such a major victory for nonprofits—nonprofits may want to reconsider.

What Does All This Mean?

This represents a significant victory for nonprofit organizations, which formed a national coalition to fight the 1986 IRS proposed rules. Jerome Walsh Skelly, an IRS Senior Attorney who helped write the rules, told nonprofits gathered at an Independent Sector meeting that "you [electing public charities] can do some lobbying." Walsh Skelly, however, qualified his remark by stating the "only way to be sure is to elect." He also noted that the recordkeeping requirements (e.g., the new Form 990) are the same for electing and non-electing public charities.

His statements suggest significant advantages to being covered by the expenditure test under sections 501(h) and 4911, rather than remaining under the insubstantial part test. Equally important, Paul Accettura, an Assistant Branch Chief within IRS' Office of Chief Counsel and co-author of the rules, answered that electing "does not put organizations on an audit track. [Electing] is a neutral factor."

What is Advocacy and Why Fund It?

By Patricia Bauman

Co-Director, The Bauman Foundation

(The following is adapted from an article by Patricia Bauman which appears in a Summer, 1991 issue of "The Chronicle of Philanthropy".)

The social-climbing, middle-class hero of Moliere's 18th century French comedy, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, engages a tutor to teach him the finer things of life. Much to his pride and amazement, he discovers that all his life he has been speaking prose!!

To some funders, the concept of "advocacy," like prose to Moliere's hero, has an exotic sound: some fear it, and others blindly shun it – whatever "it" may be. Yet advocacy is as American as apple pie and baseball. Its roots go back to the founding of the Republic. The practice of advocacy is central to the vitality and values of American democracy.

We Americans have advocacy bred in our bones. As toddlers, we begin to assert our autonomy – even if it is by lobbying for ice cream rather than spinach. By grade school, we learn our most admired historic figures were committed advocates for freedom and justice. By secondary school, we have been encouraged to stand up in favor of what we believe to be fair and just. As adults, we organize and speak out: for better public schools; for neighborhood crime watches; for or against abortion, hand gun control, tax changes. Like Moliere's prose, all of this is advocacy, which comes naturally to us.

Indeed, advocacy is so central to our national existence that our Constitution enshrines it: to each of us as citizens is guaranteed the right to "petition for the redress of grievances." Congress has nurtured this right, insisting that citizens be given a voice and a fair hearing in many of the most critical decisions of government. Congress has required government agencies to give notice of proposed rules or actions, to invite citizens to participate, and to demonstrate that they have paid heed to citizen comments. Under the federal Administrative Procedure Act, and its state counterparts, if a reviewing court finds that an agency has omitted any of these steps, it may overturn the government's action.

Advocacy grounded in ignorance, prejudice or suspicion is not our democratic ideal: *informed* advocacy is far preferable and likely to be much more effective. Other governments, even other democracies, are accustomed to deliberate in secret, announcing their rules and regulations only when they are final, as decrees from governors to the governed. Not us: two centuries of Constitutional law, jurisprudence and statutes have assured citizens' rights to know about what the government is or is not doing, so that citizens can make informed judgments, state informed responses and take informed initiatives. Freedom of information, right-to-know and sunshine laws, as well as statutes allowing citizen suits all provide tools for informed advocacy.

What, then, is a possible working definition of advocacy? Perhaps it is: *informed public participation in national, state and community decision making.* The range of activities is diverse: the church group asks city hall for more help for the homeless; the lobbyist for the sugar producers seeks farm subsidies; the environmental group sues over failure to ban a toxic chemical; and the think tank issues a policy analysis.

As is evident, citizen advocacy is a far broader concept than lobbying, which is just one advocacy technique. But advocacy encompasses all the means by which our society informs itself, analyzes issues, educates, and debates the implementation of its public values: freedom, justice, civil liberties, family welfare, environmental preservation.

This is precisely why the recent Internal Revenue Service lobbying rules for non-profit organizations give grant makers latitude to strengthen and enlighten citizen advocacy. Although the rules purport to define what grant makers can't do, it turns out that what we **can** do is much broader than what the IRS tells us we may not do. The opportunities for grant makers and grantees alike are clearly set out in *Being a Player* by Gail M. Harmon, Jessica A. Ladd and Eleanor A. Evans, published by the Advocacy Forum, a project of the Alliance for Justice. As grantmakers, we can:

- Help citizen groups use the Freedom of Information Act and other tools to monitor and report on the regulatory or legislative process.
- Support efforts to teach the public about public-policy issues, and even make grants for education efforts that take a point of view.
- Help our grant recipients with their attempts at persuading policy makers and the public to adopt a particular position. Whether the method is door-to-door canvassing, direct mail or sophisticated media advocacy campaigns,

such efforts can enrich our political dialogues if they are based upon sound policy research and analysis.

Interestingly, grant makers are even allowed to support nonprofits that lobby, as long as the philanthropies do not specifically say that their grants are to be used for lobbying activities.

Indeed, we are free to support many other forms of direct advocacy. We can support **access to the judicial system** for the redress of citizen grievances; we can support **access to executive-branch decision making and access to the regulatory process of government agencies.** Citizen groups have used precisely such access over the decades to bring us major social advances in environmental protection, food and product safety, consumer protection and civil rights.

Finally, funders are free to support **bridge-building** among community groups, building the essential networks and coalitions, which undergird successful efforts to achieve social change.

All these elements of citizen advocacy are permissible under our tax laws. But they are far more: They are essential building blocks for a democratic society. Foundations spend fortunes on research and analysis which provides the knowledge base for social change. But if we wish to achieve the just society to which research and knowledge contribute, we should embrace the advocacy which will help translate vision into reality. And that is as American as the Fourth of July!

SOME USEFUL RESOURCES

Additional Reading

Advocacy Institute: "The Advocates' Advocate," A monthly newsletter; 1730 Rhode Island Ave, N.W. Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Congressional Quarterly Press: *Current American Government – Spring, 1991 Guide*; Washington, D.C., 1991.

Harmon, Gail, Jessica Ladd, and Eleanor Evans, *Being A Player: A Guide o the IRS Lobbying Regulations for Advocacy Charities*; the Advocacy Forum: Washington, D.C. 1991. Contact the Alliance for Justice, 1601 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Suite 600, Washington, D.C. 20009.

OMB Watch: *Through The Corridors Of Power: A Guide To The Federal Rulemaking Process*; 1986, OMB Watch, 1731 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C., 20009.

Redman, Eric: *The Dance Of Legislation*; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973. (Note: this was written before the federal budget process changed, but it is still the best account of how a bill becomes a law and what it is like to take part in that process. Details of the process can easily be had; this book will make you want to go and find them.)

NOTE: Always check with the established advocacy groups working on the subject that concerns you; most have specialized materials available, and those references should be added to this list. (For example, if your interest is mental health advocacy, contact the National Council of Community Mental Health Centers or the Alliance for the Mentally Ill; if you are a children's advocate try the Child Welfare League of America or the Children's Defense Fund. Advocacy groups exist for virtually every health, human services, and environmental issue, and experienced advocates among them will be happy to direct you.)

On Our Issue

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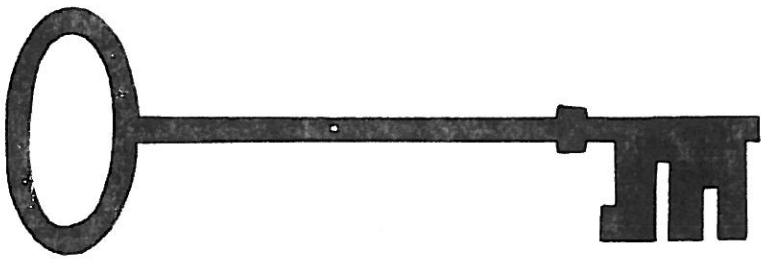
Special thanks also goes to all of the many advocates across the country whose stories and experience form the heart of what you are about to read.



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