

CRAFTING YOUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY¹

Often citizens and their organizations use combinations of different strategies to achieve their advocacy goals. Generally speaking, these advocacy and empowerment strategies can be grouped into six categories based on their primary purpose or core activity. They include the following²:

Major Advocacy Strategies

Building the Constituency for Change, a Core Strategy

This is an *advocacy core strategy* without which we cannot claim that what we do is advocacy in our own definition. Constituency building's main purpose is to help people feel their power and their ability to bring about desired change. Through building a constituency, advocacy groups and organizations make themselves accountable to their constituencies, and help these constituencies hold government and public decision makers accountable to the general public. Constituency building takes place through raising political awareness, organizing and mobilizing those affected by the problem/issue, or are interested in it, to get involved and take action. As a core strategy, it must happen together with any other selected advocacy strategy.

Co-Operation Strategies

Main purpose is to build collaboration between community groups, the state and/or business sectors to disseminate innovations, provide state services, or improve local infrastructure.

Public Education Strategies:

Main purpose is to educate and raise the public's critical consciousness; involves strengthening NGOs and CSOs to express themselves, providing information or collaborating in gathering data, analysis, and developing policy alternatives.

Research Strategies

This strategy is especially useful when there is prevailing denial about the existence of a problem, or lack of interest in the problem. To start a public discourse about a given problem, advocates would commission a research to clearly define the volume and gravity of the problem, who is affected by it, its root causes, what shapes does it take, and possible impact on people's lives. The results of the research are used as the major tool to launch a campaign to address the problem.

¹ Excerpts from Nader Tadros, 2010. *Advocacy: People's Power & Participation*. People's Advocacy, Virginia, USA, All Rights Reserved – 2010 ©.

² Adapted from VeneKlasen, Lisa; and Miller, Valerie, 2002. *A New Weave of People, Power and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Chapter 3. *World Neighbors, Oklahoma, USA*.

Persuasion Strategies

Main purpose is to use information, analysis and citizen mobilization to press for change. This strategy often involves lobbying and using the mass media to influence policy makers and public opinion. Strong communication and negotiation skills and the use of numbers to demonstrate clout are keys to success using this strategy.

Pilot or Model Programs

Where it is difficult to influence the public agenda, a successful model intervention can demonstrate to government a better way to solve problems. The pilot program could be in one or more of the areas in which the issue exists with some variance.

Litigation Strategies

Main purpose is to promote social and economic change by using the court system to test and challenge laws and institutions.

Confrontation Strategies

Main purpose is to use direct action to challenge and draw attention to negative policy impacts and to bring greater pressure for political change than in other strategies; can involve non-violent or violent approaches to direct action. We strongly recommend that groups do not use violent approaches to defend their causes. Violence, in our opinion, would lead to spiral violence on all sides. In addition, if the public perceives your group as the group that initiated violence, the public will feel threatened and lose trust in you. The Albert Einstein Institution on Non-Violence Struggle identifies 198 methods of Nonviolent Action, which can mostly be categorized as confrontational, but nonviolent methods that activists can use. You can learn more about these methods in the Institution website, www.aeinstein.org.

Good Cop – Bad Cop³

In this strategy, one of the groups takes the role of the good party that seeks to collaborate with the decision makers. At the same time, another group assumes the role of the bad party that names and shames the decision makers. In other words, the former plays the role of the good cop, and the latter plays the role of the bad cop. If this is coordinated between these two groups, they need to be fairly cautious in their cooperating together. Any leakage of such cooperation would discredit the efforts of the “good cop” group.

³ Strategy verbally described by David Cohen, 2004, in a training program by Advocacy Institute.

FACTORS IN CRAFTING YOUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY⁴

The advocacy team should carefully review the analysis that they conducted and then craft the most appropriate strategy, or a combination of strategies that best addresses the issue. The following guidelines should help you select the most appropriate strategy at a given moment.

- This strategy should help you grow your constituency and help the constituency to feel and exercise their power to change a difficult situation.
- Some strategies do not allow you to use others at the same time. If you choose to use litigation, for instance, you will find it difficult to use a persuasion strategy at the same time.
- Build the strategy around the strength of your organization/coalition. If you are good in research, see how you can use research as a main tool in your strategy.
- Certain times through your advocacy campaign, you will find that your opponents will use counter strategies that you have not thought of before, or you will discover new facts that you never knew of, that require you to change your strategy over night. You always need to be prepared for changing the strategy swiftly and properly. It is imperative that the group discusses how and who to change the strategy, and the means to communicate the new strategy to the constituency.

SELECTING AN APPROPRIATE ADVOCACY STRATEGY

VeneKlasen and Miller⁵ advise us to consider the following useful factors in selecting our advocacy strategy(ies):

“The Factors Shaping An Advocacy Strategy

There are some key factors that shape your advocacy strategy. They differ from one place to another, as well as from one issue to another:

Context

Every political environment is different. Each presents its own opportunities and constraints. Governments have different degrees of legitimacy and power vis a vis civil society, the private sector, transnationals and international institutions. Political decisions are made differently depending on the nature of the state, politics, media, etc. In some places, the legislature has more authority. In other places, the Minister of Finance dominates policymaking. Different countries have different levels of freedom and access to the public sector. Different people in these countries use these opportunities differently depending on literacy, poverty, social relationships, etc. A society’s mix of culture, religion, ethnicity, race, and economic development affect the level of tolerance and

⁴ VeneKlasen, Lisa; and Miller, Valerie, 2002. *A New Weave of People, Power and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Chapter 3. World Neighbors, Oklahoma, USA.

⁵ VeneKlasen, Lisa; and Miller, Valerie, 2002. *A New Weave of People, Power and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Chapter 10. World Neighbors, Oklahoma, USA.

openings to social change. In some countries, advocacy at the local or the international level may be more feasible than at the national level. (In Chapter 7 and Chapter 12 we provide tools for analyzing these elements of context.)

Timing

Each historic moment presents different political opportunities and constraints. International economic trends may make a country tighten or expand political space. Elections or international conferences may provide opportunities to raise controversial issues. At some moments, a march will draw attention to an issue. At other moments a march may provoke repression.

Organization

In designing your strategy, it is important to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of your organization. How broad and strong is your potential support? Do you have well-placed allies? Is there a strong sense of common purpose among the leadership? Is the decisionmaking efficient and responsive? What resources can you rely on? Are your aims clear and achievable?

Risk

Not all advocacy strategies can be used universally. In some places, a direct action aimed at a key decisionmaker may be politically dangerous, or may lessen the potential for a long-term effort at change. In some countries, pushing for change that affects cultural beliefs may provoke an unmanageable backlash. Sometimes involving people who are usually excluded, like women or poor people, may cause family, social and community conflict. Challenging relations of power tends to generate conflict and organizers must have ways of dealing with this. In more closed environments, advocacy often takes the form of community mobilization around basic needs and is not publicly referred to as political advocacy. Whatever the context, sometimes you will decide to take risks because there are no other options. In these cases, everyone involved must understand the risks.”

Working with the Political Moment

The concept of political moment, as indicated under the “timing” factor in the above quotation is a very important one. Political moments are the very specific times that provide us with special opportunities to push our cause forward. There are three different types of political moments that we need to observe.”

Predictable Political Moments

Usually elections time provide a predictable political moment where politicians are willing to listen to people’s demands more than other times. As much as elections can be a good opportunity for us, they can, as well, be a good opportunity for our opponents. We should be very well prepared to mobilize our constituency to carry a repeated message to politicians to show ourselves as a strong voting block.

Unpredictable Political Moments

While almost all unfortunate accidents or disasters happen in hard to predict moments, they, too, provide us with an opportunity to highlight our issue and help us to organize people around the need to do something about these issues. Advocates should be very vigilant in using such unfortunate moments to organize more people around the issue while such incidents are fresh in people’s minds.

Planned Political Moments

When predictable moments are far away, we can still create appropriate political moments to raise people's awareness about the issue and the need to do something about it. Examples of such planned political moments might be a conference that we organize that discusses the issue, a movie that speaks to our issue, and inviting a national or international celebrity who is known of supporting our issue.

Strategy Development Chart

Following is an example of how other groups have developed easy to use strategy development tools. The following Advocacy Development Chart is adapted from Mid West Academy to help advocacy groups to aggregate the most important factors together. This chart is one of the examples that groups can use and adapt to serve their strategy drawing purposes.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT CHART⁶

GOALS	ADVOCACY AND OPPOSITION TARGETS	ORGANIZATION CONSTITUENTS AND ALLIES	TACTICS/ ACTIVITIES.
<p>1. List the long-term goals of your advocacy campaign, the goals aimed at transforming the inequitable and undemocratic structures of society in relation to your specific problem</p> <p>2. What actions, decisions or changes do you want in the long-term – what will best address the basic cause of your problem and how will you be able to maintain your gains if successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On a <i>policy or political dimension</i>, what specific changes do we want in a policy, law, program or behaviour? - On a <i>civil society dimension</i>, what will strengthen NGOs and grass roots groups as a result of our advocacy so we can sustain and expand our gains? - On a <i>democracy dimension</i>, what will increase the political space, participation, and legitimacy of civil society with our advocacy effort? <p>3. State the intermediate goals. What constitutes victory? To what extent will the campaign?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Win concrete improvements in people's lives? - Alter the relations of power? - Give people a sense of their own power and confidence? - Build strong organizations that can make relations of power more equitable and democratic? - Improve alliances between colleague organizations? - Incorporate political awareness and citizen advocacy skills? - Increase citizen/NGO access to policy-making? <p>4. What short term or partial victories can we win as steps toward our longer-term and transformational goals?</p>	<p>Advocacy Targets</p> <p>1.Primary Advocacy targets: local, national and international.</p> <p>An advocacy target is always a person. It is never an institution or elected body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What institution (s) has the authority to grant you what you want? - Who in the institution has the power to give you what you want? - What power or influence do you or your allies have with them? How might they best be influenced? <p>Secondary Advocacy Targets: local, national, and international.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who has influence over the people with the power to give you what you want? - What power or influence do you or your allies have with them? How might they best be influenced? <p>Opposition Targets</p> <p>Opponents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who wants and has the power to stop you? - What are their strengths and weaknesses? - What will your victory cost them? - What risks do you incur by opposing them? - What level of force are they willing to use a gains you? - How can you diminish their power, take advantage of their weaknesses and lessen any danger to you? 	<p>1.Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your organization's vision and understanding of power and powerlessness? - What are your organizational strengths and weaknesses - Where can you get support to overcome weaknesses? - What resources are needed? - What risks does the organization take by pursuing this issue? - What does the organization gain if it wins? - What are the sources of your organization/s credibility, legitimacy and power? <p>2.Constituents. Who cares about this issue enough to join the organization/ campaign?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - Whose problem is it? • - What do they gain if they win? • - What risks are they taking • - What power or influence do they have with th • - How can you engage and sustain them? • - How will they participate in decision-making? <p>3. Allies. Who cares enough to participate in a coalition or joint effort?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • - Whose problem is it? • - What do they gain if they win? • - What risks are they taking? • - What power do they have over the target? • - Into what groups are they organized? • - How will they participate in decision-making? 	<p>For each target list the tactics and activities that each constituent group can best use to make its power felt.</p> <p>Tactics and activities need to be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the context of the political moment and environment - Flexible and creative - Directed at a specific target - Make sense to the membership; - Be backed up by a specific form or source of power - If you're confrontational will cause a backlash? - If you're not, confrontational will you gain any attention or make headway? <p>Advocacy tactics and activities can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action research - Workshops and conferences - Media events - Actions for information and demands - Public hearings - Strikes and demonstrations - Voter registration and voter education - Consciousness raising - Lawsuits - Accountability sessions with officials - Negotiations - Lobbying - Model projects - Policy reports - Polls - Policy writing

⁶ Adapted from the Mid West Academy, www.midwestacademy.com

Exercise

After analyzing your issue and discussing all available considerations, which strategy, or a combination of strategies, from the above, will you select for your campaign? Please explain the reasons behind your selection.