

**UNITED WAY WORLDWIDE
ADVOCATE
FOR IMPACT:
POLICY GUIDE FOR STATE
AND LOCAL UNITED WAYS
WORKING TOGETHER TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR A BETTER LIFE FOR ALL**





“Because government is a critical decision-maker and partner in providing health, education, and human services, United Ways actively engage in public policy.”

United Way of Georgia
Public Policy Agenda 2010



To: United Way Chief Professional Officers and Public Policy Leaders
From: Steve Taylor, Vice President and Counsel for Public Policy
Re: 2010 Advocate for Impact: Public Policy Guide for State and Local United Ways
Date: March 17, 2010

The United Way system is at a crossroads having embarked on a major organizational transformation to Community Impact 10 years ago. The Advancing the Common Good movement and our bold 10 year goals have taken our system the next step towards the future of United Way. To help achieve our goals, United Way launched the Live United campaign, which serves to inspire hope and create opportunities for a better life for everyone by calling on individuals to Give, Advocate, and Volunteer.

Live United seeks to unify communities and the individuals in them by calling upon our member organizations, their volunteers, supporters, and partner agencies to act as part of a cohesive effort to Advance the Common Good. The current transformation is perhaps the greatest institutional change United Way has experienced in its 123 year history. Advocating for public policy changes that advance our local, state, and national efforts is a key part of our transformation.

The Advocate for Impact: Public Policy Guide for State and Local United Ways is designed to serve as a resource for United Ways seeking to enter the public policy arena for the first time or those who want to expand fledgling public policy programs. Advocacy is a core community impact strategy that complements the existing work of United Ways and their partners. Advocacy is also an excellent tool for finding and developing new leadership for your organization and communities.

In addition to this handbook, online resources are available for your review at:

- www.liveunited.org/advocate
- www.online.unitedway.org

If you have any questions, please contact the United Way Worldwide Public Policy Department at: 703.836.7100.

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CHAPTER 1: BUILDING THE IMPACT OF UNITED WAY ADVOCACY

Background: Why Advocacy is a United Way Priority

Throughout their history, United Ways have done extraordinary work to improve people's lives and build strong communities. With its focus on community impact, United Ways have a critical role to play in advocating for good public policy. Advocacy is one of United Way Worldwide's Standards of Excellence for good reason. Decisions made by government impact the communities served, priority issues, and the strength of the United Way system. United Ways need to be part of the public dialogue, and are in a pivotal position to work with community partners to shape policies that serve the public interest.

Advocacy at the state and local level requires your United Way to use its unique knowledge, relationships, and community role to work for the changes that will improve the lives of the people and communities you serve. Our states, counties, cities, and school districts face immense challenges: budget deficits, rising health costs, disparities in education, and ever-deepening income gaps. The economic crisis forces hard choices on local governments. Without community input, United Way priorities will lose critical government policy and funding support. Put simply, your community needs you to have an impact on public policy decisions.

United Ways' collective efforts seek to:

- increase educational opportunities for early childhood;
- insure quality education for all and improve high school graduation rates;
- improve people's health;
- provide financial stability for all families and individuals; and
- make government respond to community priorities.

They cannot advance without strong public policies and strategic public investments.

United Way boards, staff, volunteers, and program participants know the community—its values, culture, and possibilities well. Community service and community leadership require United Ways to step up to the table and join and lead policy development. Otherwise, decisions will be made without the voices of the people who you serve. The work that United Ways do in communities will have a profound impact if your advocacy shapes systems that work for people and that meet your goals for community security and well-being.

"If you're not at the table, you'll be on the menu," suggests Jon Pratt, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. "There is so much at stake for the future of communities that United Ways need to work for policies that advance community priorities."

“Public policy is an integral part of community impact. United Way cannot play a Leadership role in community building without engaging in policy.”

Brian Gallagher, President and CEO, United Way Worldwide

This user's manual is for you!

Build your advocacy work starting with your current involvement and capacity. United Ways have much in common, but each is an independent local organization. Factors including size, location, staff and board experience, and community-building strategies influence where your United Way is in its advocacy work. This manual is designed to be a guide for United Ways that are just beginning their advocacy work, some that are building on limited advocacy experience, and those that are prepared to expand their involvement in public policy dialogue. Use the information and recommended practices to help move your United Way to further advance your advocacy work.

The United Way brand matters. United Way is a visible presence in most communities, and the brand, that is the reputation and competencies of the organization, is strong. Your advocacy not only benefits from that brand, it builds it. Advocacy leadership results in community benefits. It solves real problems. It positions United Way as a leader and a good partner with everyone from donors to partner agencies and service recipients. Some United Ways report increased donations, reputation and trust based on their role in pressing for important policy changes.

United Ways bring communities together for change. Working to initiate or support policy changes allows each United Way to create a better quality of life for the people it serves. Policy work protects and preserves the resources and regulations for programs to which United Way provides support and strategic influence, and builds the power of collective community voices to impact change over time. United Ways are important community partners. We mobilize nonprofits, business, labor, local governments, and people in the community in shared work to ensure a better life for all people. United Way inspires “grasstops” support from the recognized leaders of the community and “grassroots” support from people in communities who care about issues. (Grasstops and grassroots advocacy are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4).

Don't forget to include United Way affinity groups in your advocacy work. The more that each United Way works with the fullest range of community groups and the more that United Ways work together, the greater the impact. The almost 1,300 United Ways are well positioned to successfully engage in public policy advocacy.

Public policy advocacy is long-term work. As the stories and insights shared in this handbook reveal, much advocacy work requires long-term commitments. Change often takes place in incremental steps. In working for a healthy society, financial security, and

“Integrate this into the strategic planning for your organization. The public policy work needs to come as easily as the fundraising. It is all part of the same larger effort.”

Ann Mintz, Director of Public Policy- United Way of Metro Atlanta

Every United Way has a role to play. In some states, state associations can provide coordination and unify United Way state-level advocacy. In other places, United Ways combine efforts based on shared interest. If you are new to advocacy, you need to know that you don't have to do this alone. It is an important advocacy strategy to use strong partnerships for public policy work. Partnerships aggregate individual talents and resources. In a well-designed policy effort, every organization's contribution is valued. Sometimes the smallest and most rural United Way is the most valuable because it has the base information about an issue or can influence the most important member of the state legislature who is from their district. Everyone adds value to state and local policy work.

“United Way is a truly valuable partner in our effort to insure all kids in California. United Way is opening the door to corporate leaders... Their involvement helps build the broadest base of support ever organized to improve children’s health.”

**Wendy Lazarus, The Children’s Partnership 100% Campaign
From Judy Darnell, State Advocacy Director—
United Way of California**

educational success, each United Way can start from its current level of advocacy activity, contribute value to collective efforts, and build its capacity and accomplishments over time. Given the serious challenges that our communities face, the impact of economic uncertainty, and the important decisions being made by state and local governments

every year, the United Way system has a responsibility as leaders in our communities to add our perspective and expertise to the dialogue.

Your United Way is a valued resource to elected leaders. United Ways know more about the community and the issues than most elected officials. Their work compels them to be generalists. You are the specialists. You have data, stories, experience, and expertise that needs to be shared for the policy debates to be complete. Your United Way is a trusted resource, and elected officials in your area need to count on you for information. Once you play even a small role in policy by sharing what you know, your United Way can become a “go-to” community leader. Decision-makers and their staff need to know what your work reveals about problem solving strategies that work. They need to have you at the table when they are shaping the future and deciding how to allocate limited resources. So think first about your role in the community as a steward of information that is essential to shaping policies that work for people. Then recognize that your United Way can use knowledge, trust, and leadership in the community to influence the outcome of policy debates.

Make the Most of the Manual

This handbook is organized to accomplish the following:

Chapter 1:

- Build awareness of the opportunity and need for United Way and its partners to work together in shaping public policy
- Offer a framework for approaching public policy work that enables organizations to design their work with good planning and skill-building

Chapter 2:

- Create a path for planning public policy engagement
- Enable your United Way to build a systematic plan for your policy work
- Present basic information that affirms that lobbying is legal and it is the right thing to do!

Chapter 3:

- How to learn about the structures and processes at your state and local governments

Chapter 4:

- Building your advocacy goals and messages
- Suggestions and exercises to strengthen skills and build leadership for meeting policy goals through organizing

Chapter 5

- Advocacy and direct lobbying: how to persuade decision-makers to support your point of view
- Communications with supporters and decision-makers

Chapter 6:

- Tactics for getting your story told your way
- Building strategic relationships with the media

Chapter 7:

- Putting it all together: key themes

Watch for guidelines, worksheets, and stories that help you do this important work well!

What is public policy? And how do we think about advocacy in a systematic and steady way?

“**Public policy** is the set of decisions that we make at every level of government about how we will care for one another, our communities, and the land.”

Public policy is at the core of United Ways work: Your organization’s overarching commitment is to serve the public good. Public policy engagement is an essential way to insist on policies that benefit everyone in the community and keep communities sound.

Advocacy involves embracing and promoting an idea or cause. Advocacy is the work that United Ways do to influence policy choices. You can meet your policy goals using careful planning, quality research and information, and clear and compelling messages.

Lobbying is a very specific form of advocacy. You are lobbying when you, your staff or volunteers speaking on United Way’s behalf, ask an elected official to act/vote in a particular way on a specific issue.

Keep in mind that **advocacy is a broad effort to promote a position**. While advocating for out-of-school time programs for youth, you might talk to many groups and individuals about how important such programs are for helping

people to succeed in school, and how effective they are at intervening with young people who have had their first interaction with the criminal justice system. You are promoting the idea that these programs have great value to the community and everyone should support them. **You are lobbying when you extend your general advocacy to the specific situation in which you are asking a decision-maker to act on a defined proposal**. When you ask Senator Smith if she will support the Senate bill that funds out-of-school time programs and vote yes when the bill is being acted on, then you are lobbying.

Organizing is finding people who share your point of view on an issue and asking them to join in your effort to advance a policy idea. It involves identifying people who have an interest in the issue area, organizations that might already be working on the issue, and individuals who want to act on an issue once they understand the implications that issue has for them and for their community. Organizers work to identify, engage, educate, prepare, mobilize, and continue to work with supporters to build support and work together for change.

“What is public policy participation? Public policy participation is the utilization of tactics and strategies to gain access to public decision-making and to influence government, media, individuals, and other institutions that make decisions affecting the public. It is also a commitment to a long-term process whereby the public, institutions, and decision-makers come together to deliberate and decide the rules of society.”

David Arons in *Policy in Power*.

Start with a methodical approach to advocacy:

To prepare your point of view and plan your advocacy, you need to be able to answer four basic questions:

What is the specific problem or opportunity?

Exactly what do you want to have happen?

Who decides?

How do you influence them?

Once your United Way has identified your goal (the policy change that you want), you need to determine which tools you will use to build your advocacy campaign. There are three essential advocacy tools that you may use: grassroots and grassroots organizing, lobbying, and media advocacy.

To build as broad and influential a base of supporters as possible for your issue, organizing for grassroots and grassroots advocacy is a key strategy. Lobbying and general promotion of your position places a focus on the work that you and your supporters do to inform and persuade decision-makers about the issue and your point of view. Media advocacy allows you to increase the visibility of your position on the issue and help you to have your story told your way.

This basic framework for advocacy allows you to explore how you want to design your advocacy effort. **Try this out by taking an issue that you care about, answering the questions, and listing ways in which you might use the three major strategies and why.**

Framework for advocacy

Core questions:

What is the problem or opportunity?

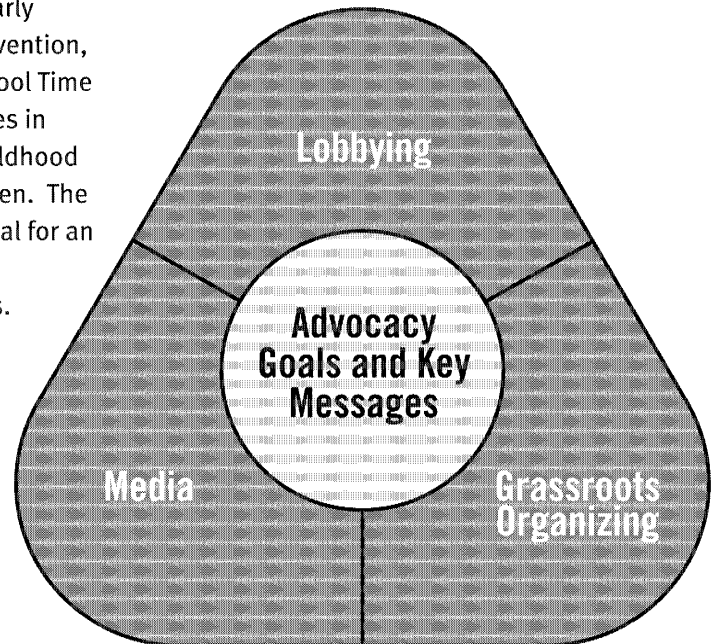
What do you want to have happen?

Who decides?

How do you influence them?

Many United Ways are choosing to work on education-related issues including: early childhood development, drop out prevention, teacher effectiveness, and Out-of-School Time programs. Others include health issues in their legislative agenda, including childhood obesity and health coverage for children. The need for economic security and survival for an increasing number of people are clear and present issues for all United Ways.

Your issue priorities will be shaped, in part, by United Way Worldwide's federal public policy agenda which many of you are involved in developing. Priorities will also be set by what is happening in your state and community. Often United Ways initiate or respond in timely ways to issues that are in debate and impact their communities in particular ways.



Building Advocacy Builds Leadership

There are many benefits to engaging in public policy advocacy. Your United Way is able to bring together many community players and leaders, and the changes that you work for in our public policies are important in people's lives. Your policy accomplishments support your organization's ability to carry out programs. Another important benefit of policy engagement is that building advocates builds leaders. Those who act to influence policy positions learn to use their organization's

knowledge and experience to inform the dialogue and to assert a point of view. They find their voice. Advocates win allies and gain the respect of others in the community for their willingness to work on public interest issues and to shape policy discussions. **Nonprofits, including United Ways, find that leadership in policy work elevates the organization's leadership position in the community. Ethical advocacy wins partners, builds membership, and provides community leadership.**

Conclusion

This chapter underscores the importance of United Way advocacy work. You have begun to work with some definitions and a framework for thinking about how to build your policy work. The next section of the manual offers

specific suggestions about how to prepare your organization, and how to build your capacity to engage in policy work intentionally and for the long-term.

CHAPTER 2: PREPARING YOUR UNITED WAY FOR EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Background: Preparing to be an effective advocacy organization

United Ways have an opportunity and a responsibility to be part of the public policy dialogue at the state and local level. We have knowledge and experience that supports policy makers in making informed decisions. And we have unique opportunities to involve our partners (other United Ways and our allies) in meaningful, ongoing policy work to advance our goals.

This chapter focuses on readiness and the strengths that United Ways have, or can readily build, for policy engagement. To make a significant difference and advance our positions on issues, we need to be well prepared to be strategic and effective. The ideas and tools included here are designed to support nonprofits of all types: large, small, urban, suburban, and rural. The important work that we do singly and together requires us to be prepared to do the work well in our states, counties, and cities.

Keep in mind that advocacy is an important tactic for meeting community needs and fulfilling your mission. You are a well-respected community entity and you have a mission that emphasizes community impact. Your programs evolved through reliance on strategic plans, good governance, talented staff, communications systems, and broad networks within United Way and your communities. Policy engagement requires that you apply these organizational strengths to your policy work.

We need to have dedicated organizational capacity to maximize our value in working for needed change. The Public Policy Capacity Inventory presented here enables you to identify what you already have in place and the strengths that you want to build for advancing advocacy. Your first response to this inventory creates a profile of your United Way at a moment in time. Refer to it as you build your advocacy initiatives and experience. Monitor how much you strengthen your ability to be a meaningful participant in shaping the public policies that will improve people's lives. Whether you are working with other United Ways to press for more investments in early childhood development, 2-1-1 funding or affordable health coverage for children, your internal strengths will ensure that you and your United Way partners can make a difference.

Worksheet #1

This inventory explores your organizational readiness for advocacy. It allows you to see your current internal capacity and your readiness to build your issue agenda. Engage the people who will make decisions about and implement your advocacy work in this exercise. This assessment invites you to see where you are and where you want to be.

Note “ from Marcia Avner, *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, with permission from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and Fieldstone Alliance”

United Way Public Policy Readiness Inventory

1. Does your United Way have board and/or staff champions who build the organization’s interest in policy advocacy?
 Yes Just one or two No
2. Does your United Way have a formal commitment to engage in policy advocacy, such as a strategic plan or a board resolution that makes advocacy a priority?
 Yes Working on it Not at all
3. Does your United Way have a process for selecting the issues and the policy positions that are your priorities?
 Yes We know a good idea when we see it No
4. Do you have a formal public policy plan?
 Yes Working on it No
5. Does the plan provide for resources for advocacy and lobbying?
 Yes Need to do this No
6. Do you have access to good information about your priority issues and the data and stories that support your position on the issue?
 Yes Need to find out No
7. Do you prepare informational materials that explain the issues and persuade others to support your positions?
 Yes Occasionally No
8. Do you build support within the organization and the community for your positions? Yes? No? If yes, do you reach out to include:

<input type="checkbox"/> Board?	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff?
<input type="checkbox"/> Volunteers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Partner Agencies?
<input type="checkbox"/> Neighboring United Ways?	<input type="checkbox"/> Other nonprofit allies?
<input type="checkbox"/> The business community?	<input type="checkbox"/> Community leaders?
<input type="checkbox"/> Media?	<input type="checkbox"/> Organized labor?
<input type="checkbox"/> Others?	
9. Does the state in which you live/work have some sort of formal statewide coordination? (eg. formal state organization, formal state association, formal public policy committee, etc)
 Yes Need to find out No
10. Do you have good lists and ways of communicating regularly with your supporters?
 Yes Need to build this No
11. Do you know how arenas for change are structured and how decisions are made?

City Council:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Need to know more
County Gov:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Need to know more
State Legislature:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Need to know more

12. Which of the following advocacy activities do you do, if even in a limited way?

- Build relationships with decision-makers at the legislative or executive level?
 - Invite them to visit your organization?
 - Visit them at town hall meetings?
 - Meet them in their offices?
 - Involve them in United Way events?
 - Convince them that you are a resource to them and have information and stories that will help them better understand your issues?
 - Regularly share information about United Way issues and initiatives with them?
- Educate your board, staff, volunteers, or others about policy issues? This includes promoting issues that are emphasized by United Way Worldwide or your own locally-based organizations.
- Engage in direct lobbying (eg. asking elected officials to vote to support your position?)
- Have staff designated to be your official spokespersons in lobbying activities?
- Work with a contract lobbyist?
- Work with a group of United Way or other partners to expand the base of support and share advocacy and lobbying responsibilities?

13. Who's doing what and when?

We have designated a person to coordinate our policy planning and work.

- Yes No Plan to

The policy role of the board is clear.

- Yes No In discussion

Staff policy roles are clear.

- Yes No Soon

We have a 'rapid response' team ready to make decisions and set the course for action when we are in the midst of fast-moving policy action.

- Yes No Will begin to establish this

We have a public policy committee with defined responsibility.

- Yes, of course. Oops, no Working on it

14. If a public policy committee is in place who serves on it?

- Staff Board level Combination of the two

15. Nonprofits can and should lobby, but do you know the rules?

We understand the IRS rules for 501(c) 3 lobbying?

- Yes No Eager to learn

16. We understand the registration and reporting requirements in our state?

- Yes No Eager to learn

The United Way Readiness Assessment provides a glimpse at what you already have in place or in progress. Most organizations work to increase capacity on an ongoing basis, and few, if any, organizations are perfectly “ready” all of the time. Your organization will enjoy coming back to this exercise to see how you have built your capacity over time.

Each United Way is unique and works within a specific policy landscape. All United Ways have an opportunity to be a voice on issues at the local, state, and national level. And many United Ways working together have a powerful and effective voice. The following “Basic Building Blocks” will enable your organization to begin or enhance the way in which you take a clear approach to building your strengths and your impact.

Building Blocks for United Way Public Policy Advocacy

Plan on a sustainable commitment to public policy work

Most changes in public policy take time, and often change is incremental. United Ways have always been important community organizations and understand that change requires a sustained effort. Working for change requires a long-term commitment and ongoing excellence in planning and advancing an advocacy agenda.

United Way is committed to making advocacy a priority strategy for Advancing the Common Good and contributing to community building. Being a leadership organization and a strong partner requires high levels of intentionality and good, solid planning.

Build a strong organizational public policy initiative

The basic requirements for powerful policy work include building organizational capacity. Internal capacity includes asserting the will to do policy advocacy, formalizing the organization’s commitment, developing a policy plan that includes procedures for adopting issues, and committing resources: time, money, and talent.

These are some specific actions that your organization can take to be advocacy ready:

- Convene a planning team within your organization.

Create a planning team: This team should include both the individuals who are strong champions for advocacy work, and board and staff members who can provide leadership for advancing advocacy. Their responsibility is to initiate the actions that will make advocacy part of what your United Way does on an ongoing basis
- Select a planning coordinator. This person is the steward of the process and will facilitate the planning and design effort in multiple ways:
 - convening meetings,
 - setting the agenda,
 - preparing background materials for the team,
 - recording discussions and decisions,
 - preparing materials for board/staff discussion.

- Design and prepare a vision and goals for advocacy work: This is the chance to take a “big picture” view of what advocacy can mean to your organization’s strategies for having a positive impact on the community and for your organizational leadership in the community. The team should imagine how leadership on advocacy helps promote United Way as a strong, well-respected, trusted voice and a player that should be “at the table” where decisions are made. Because United Ways can work together, your efforts can be part of a larger effort and have increased impact. United Ways have the advantage of our organizational brand – the reputation and competencies of the work done in communities. That existing trust leverages United Way leadership so that your organization has a notable voice in fighting for the best interests of the community.

The team can take specific steps to capture vision and goals:

- Review the organization’s mission. Define the mission of your public policy work relative to its ability to advance your overall mission.
- Set big picture goals for your policy work. In 3-5 years and beyond, what will change in the community as a result of your advocacy? How will your community be stronger?
- Set organizational goals as well as policy goals: How will you and your partners be stronger advocates in the policy dialogue? How will people with whom you work and serve have a more effective voice in the decisions that impact their lives? What are your ongoing relationships with local and state elected and appointed officials, as well as relationships with members of Congress and executive branch officials?
- How can your organization be a meaningful part of a larger United Way advocacy effort?
- Write out your vision and goals.

The vision and goals statements set the path for your policy work. The team should share them widely within the organization and build from them the more specific plans for your policy work.

- Establish criteria for your policy issue priorities and a process for choosing issues. Criteria should include:
 - Selecting issues consistent with your mission and demonstrated areas of interest and expertise.
 - Choosing issues based the value you can add to the policy debate and where United Way’s voice is needed.
 - Selecting issues that are timely so that the opportunity exists to influence the policy outcomes. Choose issues that are already on the agenda and in process or that you want to initiate based on their timeliness and community needs.
 - Limiting the number of issues on which you will work so that you use your capacity and strengths in a targeted and productive way. Often working on one issue is sufficient and a good match to your organizational capacity.

Select issues based on criteria and need:

- Select issues that gain a strong consensus and that are meaningful to your organization and allies. What do you think is most important as state and local governments set policy and spending priorities?
- Consider selecting issues where you have ready partners and can maximize your collective clout. Working together allows even very small organizations to make a big difference on an issue of local or statewide importance.
- Some organizations place a priority on having a list of long term policy issue goals and working on the short term steps that lead to victory in long term goals.

“Don’t think your United Way exists in a vacuum. Find the respected partners who want and need you. Figure out the value you add to the work. United Way does have power, a strong brand, and cross sector relationships. Project the credibility of your organization and constantly show your relevance. Find the right place for your work in the collective effort, and share the credit for work well done.”

Jason Sabo, Senior Vice President of Public Policy—
United Ways of Texas

- Write up both the overarching selection criteria that the team determines should shape policy choices. Then write up the issues that you have selected and explain the ways in which they complement your vision, goals, and criteria.

Establish your organizational structure for implementing your plan:

- Define responsibilities of the board. These may include final decisions about the public policy agenda and the resources to be allocated to policy work. Board members are often excellent spokespersons for the organization’s policy positions.
- Define responsibilities of the staff. This includes assigning coordination, research, organizing, media outreach, and advocacy roles.
- Determine whether you will have a Public Policy Advisory Committee. Prepare a charge for the committee. Determine if it will be a board committee or will include other community partners.
- Secure the training that board and staff members need to do this work well. United Way has tools, talent, and expertise to help you do your planning well.

Worksheet #2

Use the following chart to identify who is responsible for the components of capacity building that are presented in this chapter. Board, staff, and volunteers all have a role to play. As your work develops, you can add and revise specific individuals who have key responsibilities. Once your United Way, no matter your size or location, knows who is doing what, you can make important contributions to the public policy dialogues at state and local arenas for change.

Note “from Marcia Avner, *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, with permission from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and Fieldstone Alliance”

Decisions and Actions	Key Decision-Makers and Facilitators
Initiate discussions about policy work	_____
Commit to building advocacy capacity	_____
Coordinate policy planning and development	_____
Form a team to update or create plans (Who convenes? Who participates?)	_____
Write up vision and goals for policy	_____
Prepare criteria for issue selection	_____
Design a process for issue selection	_____
Adopt criteria and process for issue selection	_____
Determine the purpose and make up of a policy committee	_____
Establish policy communications systems	_____
Identify and build relationships with policy partners (United Way and community partners)	_____
Determine board and staff roles in completing the policy plan	_____

United Ways of California

Public Policy Council

Operating Guidelines

Judith M. Darnell, State Advocacy Director for United Ways of California shares her organization's Public Policy Guidelines. They are included here to illustrate one way in which your United Way can engage in a deliberative process to determine what will guide your long term advocacy work.

I. Why Public Policy

The United Ways of California engage in a number of different strategies to fulfill our mission, "to improve people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities." We raise charitable contributions and invest them in community impact areas to address the most urgent issues our communities face. Our strategies include building on community strengths and assets, funding community initiatives and advocating for public policy changes to achieve our community impact goals.

We recognize that quantum change or systemic change often requires legislative action or a dramatic shift in how government operates. To that end, United Ways recognize a strong role in advocacy through public policy is required to gain the needed improvement in the community conditions that we seek.

We work with a wide variety of partners to effect public policy change: the non-profit community, the business sector, the community of faith, and the public sector. Government at all levels plays a significant role in achieving our community impact goals. We will communicate and collaborate with government to further our priorities.

II. What will be considered

United Ways of California will advocate significant public policy issues affecting our community impact goals, volunteerism in non-profit organizations, human development and the human service delivery system, and other important community concerns.

III. Criteria for Selection of Public Policy Issues and Positions

Our public policy proposals will further United Ways' community impact goals, will represent opportunities for United Ways to build consensus in the state and will enhance United Ways' ability to develop and enhance relationships with other partners. Our advocacy role should not adversely affect our ability to fundraise.

IV. How The United Way Public Policy Process Works

All public policy positions require approval of the Public Policy Council which will be composed of one representative of each dues paying United Way. The United Ways of California position on public policy issues will be in the form of broad principles which further United Way priorities, as well as specific details of proposed legislation that fulfills our intent.

In setting our annual public policy agenda, the Public Policy Council will consider the following questions in selecting policies for advocacy.

- What is United Way's anticipated role? What does this proposal do or recommend and what are the broad principles United Way is supporting?
- Is this proposal consistent with our mission, values, community impact goals and strategic direction?
- How many people, children, other constituencies does this affect? Will it improve the quality of life for Californians? What data supports these findings?

- Is this a preventative measure? What research, studies or models support the effectiveness of this particular prevention strategy?
- What is the local, statewide and national impact?
- Which level of government must be influenced?
- Does this policy require funding? How much? What does it mean for costs to other levels of government (i.e., city, county, schools, state, national, etc)?
- Will it save society money?
- Who else is advocating for this proposal? Why? What vested interests might these advocates have in the proposal's success?
- Who is opposing this proposal? Why? What vested interests might opponents have if the proposal is not successful?
- Who is providing the principal leadership on this public policy position? Why?
- Is there an opportunity for United Way to bring stakeholders together to build bi-partisan consensus?

- Will association with this proposal enhance United Ways' visibility and reputation and strengthen our resource development capacity?

V. Possible Policy Actions and Communications of Public Positions

All actions will be determined on a case by case basis. All public policy positions of United Ways of California will be approved by the Public Policy Council prior to any outside communication. The United Ways proposing the position will forward to Council members information for their review. Individual council members will return comments in support or in opposition to issues to the full council. The council will meet by conference call or in person to take action on the proposed position. The decision of the council will be communicated to all member United Ways.

VI. Resources for Public Policy Advocacy

The Public Policy Council will develop an annual budget for the costs associated with United Ways of California's public policy advocacy. The Council will work with the Executive Council

Your organization is prepared to commit to advancing important policies and to having a well-prepared system for designing and implementing policy plans. By involving board members, staff, volunteers, and others, you ensure that the work is manageable and continues to be a priority for your specific organization. As you engage in planning and readiness strategies, there is value in knowing the laws that pertain to nonprofit lobbying.

Jason Sabo, Senior Vice President of Public Policy for United Way of Texas outlines below UWT's approach to Public Policy and recent success in the area of Pre-K education.

United Ways of Texas (UWT) takes a methodical approach to its public policy work, knowing that it takes engaged and motivated volunteers, savvy advocacy and patience to move legislation through the Texas Capitol. With the generous support of the Pew Charitable Trusts and numerous Texas-based funders, UWT and its 75 local United Way members have worked aggressively for years to develop and implement a winning strategy to expand access to high quality, universally accessible pre-kindergarten. Because policymakers rely on both good data and good politics, UWT carefully sequenced its advocacy and lobbying.

First, the organization built a strong research base by partnering with the Bush School for Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University to determine the return on the state's investment in pre-k and by contracting with a conservative polling firm to survey Texans' attitudes about pre-k investments. Next, using the positive finding from both research efforts as the foundation of their lobbying and advocacy, UWT worked tirelessly to expand eligibility to and the quality of the Texas pre-kindergarten program.

In 2006 UWT led the effort to expand pre-k eligibility to include military children. In 2007 UWT coordinated efforts to expand eligibility to all children who have been in the Texas foster care system. In 2009 UWT returned to the Capitol and helped secure an additional \$25 million in new funding for pre-kindergarten. Taken individually, each of these reforms may appear small. However, their combined impact has been the expansion of Texas pre-k to thousands of children and an increase in funding equivalent to millions of dollars per year. Thoughtful advocacy, careful sequencing of research and lobbying, and a statewide movement of engaged United Way donors are literally worth millions to some of Texas' most vulnerable children.

Know the Law

The laws that govern nonprofit advocacy and lobbying are easy to understand and affirm that United Ways, as 501(c) (3) nonprofit organizations, can and should, lobby. Your organization will report lobbying activities on the annual IRS 990 report. There are things to know about the law and how to make sure that everyone doing this work understands how much you can do and the limits on your lobbying.

Nonprofits can choose to be covered by IRS rules that provide a bright line test of how much lobbying you can do. While nonprofits have a starting point that says they may do "no substantial" lobbying, everyone recognizes that to be a vague standard. As a result, the IRS gives 501(c) 3 organizations other than churches and private foundations a better

option. That option is to elect to fall under the provisions of the 1976 Lobby Law that define a basic expenditure limit for nonprofit lobbying activities.

Your United Way can, and should, elect to file Form 5768. This simple form needs to be filed only once, and it tells the IRS that you want to fall under more specific lobbying limits. Filing this form is referred to as taking the "H" election because it identifies you as selecting the 501(h) expenditure test. The H election allows you to choose a clear and simple set of lobbying expenditure guidelines. Once you file this form (and keep a record for your files) the following guidelines apply to your organization:

Lobbying Limits for Nonprofits that Choose the Expenditure Test

Your United Way can spend:

- 20% of your first \$500,000 of exempt purpose expenditures; and
- 15% of the next \$500,000 of exempt purpose expenditures; and
- 10% of the next \$500,000 of exempt purpose expenditures; and
- 5% of any additional expenditures up to a cap of \$1,000,000 in lobbying expenditures.

This very generous test is more than almost any organization can spend on lobbying. And because it measures your expenditures, there is an accurate and transparent way to report lobbying.

There is one additional component of the lobby limits. Of the amounts that you are permitted to spend, all of it could go to direct lobbying. Direct lobbying is considered to be your asking an elected official to act in a specific way on a particular proposal or piece of legislation. It is also direct lobbying when you ask your staff and volunteers to lobby and ask an elected official to vote in a specific way.

There are tighter limits on what an organization can do in grassroots lobbying. In grassroots lobbying you are reaching out to the broad public to contact an elected official and urge

him/her to support a particular position on a specific piece of legislation. Under the IRS guidelines your organization can spend up to 25% of the allowable limit on grassroots lobbying.

Keep in mind that this test only requires you to report expenditures for lobbying. Much of your general education and advocacy, activities that don't involve the "ask" for a specific vote or action from an elected official, don't count toward the limit.

These are the basic rules: either fall under the "no substantial lobbying" rule or elect to fall under the clear expenditure test that sets a clear and consistent spending limit on lobbying. It is a good idea to select the clear spending limits, and your board should address this opportunity as you plan how you will design your policy efforts.

\Additional information about the Lobby Law is available at the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest, (www.clpi.org), and the Alliance for Justice's, "Worry Free Lobbying" (www.afj.org).

Too many people think that nonprofits can't lobby. Now you know how much is allowed and that lobbying is not only the right think to do, it is legal!

Summary of Building Blocks

By the time your organization works with the organizational assessment and the planning and action steps introduced here, you will:

- Have a clear picture of your organization's strengths and needs
- Write a statement of your vision and goals for what you can accomplish through advocacy to meet your mission
- Planned your internal capacity for doing advocacy work well

- Identified roles for board, staff, volunteers, and others

- Know how much lobbying is permissible
- ...and you are ready to identify and develop key issues for your advocacy work: lobbying, grassroots advocacy, and media advocacy.

Onward!

CHAPTER 3 WHERE'S THE ACTION?

Who are the decision-makers? How does the process work?

As you are shaping your issues and building the partnerships that will be important in your advocacy work, dedicate time to learning the basics about policy arenas. Determine if your policy work involves issues that are decided at the state, county, city, school board, township or other level. This chapter suggests some ways to learn about “who decides” and how their processes work. Knowing who the decision-makers are, when they meet, and how they proceed to work on an issue enables you to develop effective plans and tactics.

Where will your issue be debated and decided? Is this an issue that will be decided by the legislative branch: state legislature, county board, city, school board, or other elected body? Or is it an issue that will be dealt with at the executive level: by a Governor, Commission, or Mayor? Perhaps it is an issue that won't require legislative review or an executive action but will be decided by program managers within governmental agencies.

Determine where you need to influence decision-makers to support or oppose the proposals that relate to your issue. Explore which levels of government make decisions related to your priorities in the districts where your United Way board, staff, volunteers, and programs are

located. If you need guidance, your own elected officials and their staff can help you to find out where the action is going to happen. This is one reason that it makes sense to prepare for advocacy work by learning about the elected officials who are your representatives.

To begin your research, rely on the expertise within your board and staff and, as needed, consult with your partners in other United Ways as well as leaders in community organizations. Descriptive information is readily available. States, counties, and cities usually have websites that provide information about officials and issues, as well as their processes. Learn what you can from internet-based resources, and use that information to target the people whom you want to get to know. United Way Worldwide's Legislative Action Center (<http://capwiz.com/unitedway/home/>) is also an excellent resource, providing opportunity to get involved and advocate on behalf of United Way's federal legislative priorities.

Most United Ways have existing connections to local elected officials. Your own representatives are almost always eager to help you, and the more you have strong, ongoing relationships with elected officials and staff, the more they will be willing to support and inform your work.

Checklist of action steps for learning about how the decision-making process works at each level:

- Read web-based information.
- Pay attention to news coverage of your issue and your elected officials. This will enable you to understand what is already being said about your issue, even before you meet with your elected officials.
- Contact the elected officials with whom you already have relationships if you need their help in understanding the process of how an idea becomes a law.
- Watch the legislature, county board, city council or other body on web casts or community cable telecasts of their governmental meetings. It is interesting and informative to see governmental bodies in their formal chambers. Observers are almost always welcome at these public meetings. This step allows you to be comfortable with the process, the places, and the people with whom you will need to meet.

- Aggregate the information that you and your partner organizations have already acquired.
- Join your United Way State Association if you have one, your partners in the United Way and in the community, for the Day on the Hill that they sponsor to identify their interests to elected officials and often to lobby. This is a comfortable way to join a group meeting with a decision-maker. You add value to these meetings as the voice of United Way, important community stakeholders, and people committed to policies that strengthen people, families, and communities.
- Sign up online or in person for information that the governmental body sends out. Almost every level of government has an information office or clerk's office and you can sign up for many types of informational materials: lists and biographies of elected officials, schedules of meetings and agenda updates emailed on a regular basis, summaries of hearings and meetings, and more.
- Take a formal tour of your state capitol, county offices, or city hall. These tours, usually set up for visitors interested in the art and architecture, will give your United Way team increased familiarity with the public buildings where you might be spending a lot of time.

Arrange a customized working tour of your legislative, county, or city building.

Someone within your organization or community network is likely to be an experienced lobbyist or elected official, and that person can plan and guide your advocacy team through a working tour that includes essential information for policy advocates. For instance, a working tour of a state capitol might include:

- learning where the legislative library is and what research the staff there can provide for you,
- finding Upper and Lower chamber information officers where you can get a quick training on effective use of the legislative website,
- a look at hearing rooms with an explanation of how your legislature places witnesses who come to testify at a hearing and the protocol that accompanies testimony,
- the location of legislative offices so that you can easily find the people you want to meet,
- determining the location of the mail room where your United Way can drop off letters for all elected officials,
- the location of the press corps and the protocol for providing members of the media with information and press releases,
- location in the complex of public buildings for parking and meals,
- how your organization can secure space at the Capitol if you are joining with others on your issue and setting up a Day on the Hill,
- scheduling a meeting with a legislator as part of the tour and have that person explain the most effective ways to communicate with your House and Senate members,
- arranging to have a member of the Capitol Press provide insights about what they consider news, how to communicate with them, and their deadlines.
- executive branch offices: the governor, the secretary of state, and the attorney general. Where are they in the Capitol complex?

An informal tour of a smaller body of more local government is relatively easy to do and can include meetings with staff, elected officials, and the local media. These special tours for a manageable number of your board, staff, and partners can energize and inform the way that you proceed as you plan and execute your advocacy and lobbying work.

Need to know

As you learn about the arenas of decision-maker, these are the facts that will shape your approach:

Who are the decision-makers? Learn their names, read their biographies, and become familiar with their responsibilities. Where do they spend their time and effort? Knowing committee and task force assignments gives you important information about their interests and priorities.

What is the process that moves an idea from its introduction to a final vote? What path will your policy proposal take? In most bodies, elected officials want good ideas prior to the start of their deliberations. Most policy proposals are examined by a committee or sub-committee, and this is where the public meetings provide opportunities for public comment. Often at the state level bills move concurrently through a House and Senate and differences need to be reconciled. At the state level, the executive branch is an important factor as the Governor has veto power.

Where the issue is debated is important. States differ in how they address health and human services issues, and there are often issues that are addressed at both the state and county level. The same is true of funding paths. The state may appropriate money to local governments, and the local governments then choose the priorities for expenditure and investment. If you are seeking to build a program that requires funding, you might be following that issue from the state to the local level.

When decisions are made will drive your action planning. Most elected bodies have a timeline for addressing policy and budget proposals. Knowing those benchmark times will enable your United Way to be prepared and to be a voice on the issues in a timely and effective way.

As your United Way invests board and staff time in building your understanding of the policy process, the people of the process, and the informational resources available to you, you expand your potential in three key ways. Knowing how the system works, and continuing to build on your basic understanding, will:

Prepare you to be strategic for the long term planning and commitment needed to make important policy changes,

Increase your value as a knowledgeable organization engaging in the process, either alone or as a high value partner,

Establish your leadership role as an organization that has access to decision-makers and knows how to maximize your impact on the decision-making process.

Remember, you are learning about the decision-makers and the process because your United Way is a critical resource to decision-makers. You will continue to interact with the policy shaping process for the long term, celebrating victories and forging ahead in tough times. Knowing the who, what, where, and when of the way policy is formed increases your ability to bring your knowledge, experience, expertise, and stories to the public dialogue.

Don't forget to use available resources:

Use the websites sponsored by the governmental entity. These include everything from a system of identifying your own representatives to biographies of elected officials, committee assignments, past history of legislation on issues, and daily updates of action at city hall or the capitol. LIVEUNITED.org also has several links to facilitate communication and provide additional background information.

Rely on the people you know: legislators who champion your issues, partners working on the issue, board members, staff, and lobbyists with other organizations.

Pick up the phone and ask: almost every city, county, or state Capitol has an information officer who can help to direct you to the information that you need.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING POWER FOR POLICY IMPACT

The Art of Persuasion

Previous chapters have focused on approaches to shaping your policy goals and identifying issues, developing your policy plan, and increasing your knowledge of the policy-making process. You have answers to most of the questions introduced in the framework for thinking about policy advocacy:

- What is the problem or opportunity?
- What do you want to have happen?
- Who decides?

Now you are ready to tackle the last question:

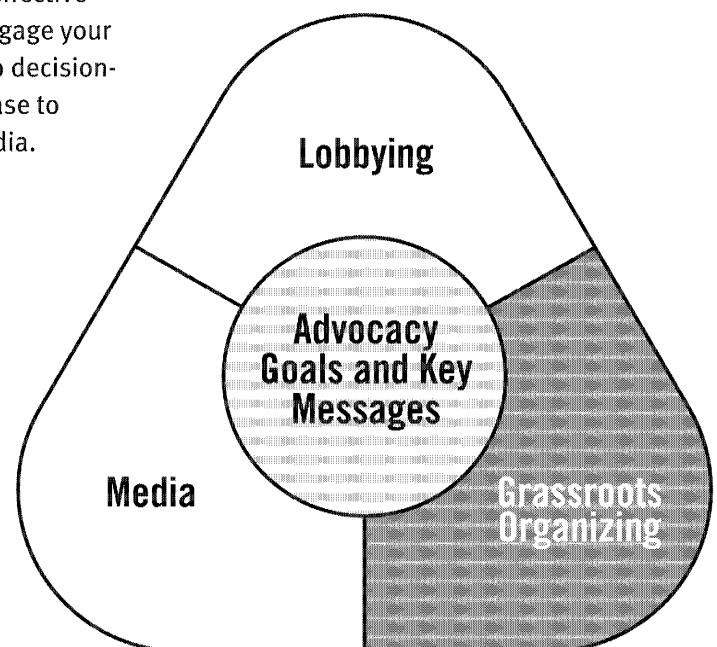
- How do you persuade decision-makers?

This chapter starts with one of the strategies that works well for nonprofit advocacy: community-based *grasstops* and *grassroots* organizing to build and strengthen your base of support. Once you have key leaders in the community and partner organizations supporting your work, you can do effective advocacy and lobbying. You can engage your base of supporters in advocating to decision-makers, and also in making your case to opinion shapers, including the media.

Grasstops advocacy can better be thought of as reaching out to supporters in the community who have existing position and power and can use their access and influence to advance an advocacy position. For United Ways, these are great partnership efforts in which community leaders use their standing in the community to support policies that they agree with.

Grassroots advocacy, on the other hand, refers to engaging and activating everyday people, uniting them to build power and be a voice on the issues that matter to them and their community.

Here we will focus on the grassroots organizing point of the “advocacy triangle,” with an emphasis on the unique and strong relationships that United Ways have in the community.



Using strategic partnerships

One of the great strengths that your United Way brings to the state and local policy debate is that you have already established partnerships with many individuals and institutions. You already have access to United Way partners in your state, to the many business and other community leaders who support your work, and to agencies that work at the grassroots level to serve people who are intended to be beneficiaries of improved policies. Your policy work has the extraordinary advantage of your already having “grasstops” and “grassroots” supporters.

United Ways are working for change in troubling times. Many states and communities are struggling with budget deficits and uncertainty. Working with an ever-expanding base allows your United Way to enlist people and organizations who can use their relationships to carry your persuasion campaign to decision-makers in meaningful ways.

When considering how to persuade decision-makers to support your position on issues, think about them with two governing questions. For every Governor or Mayor, legislator or city council member, you need to ask:

What do they need to know?

Who do they need to hear from?

Having a strong base of supporters allows you to reach decision-makers by having trusted voices, including experts, speak out about the need for your desired policy. Having that strong base of support means that elected officials will hear from community leaders with whom they interact often, those whose status in the community and experience with community issues is influential. Your base of support has additional importance because elected officials are attentive to their constituents. Elected officials almost always place a priority on communications from constituents- the people who live in their district, who vote them into office and hold them accountable once they are in office.

Your relationships, current and future, will allow you to ask your supporters to talk to their own legislators, to others who trust them, and to tell their own stories about how their lives in the district are affected by the policy in debate.

United Way’s potential to bring about change lies in the power of its relationships.

Who is on your team and who do you need?

Step one: list your supporters. Inventory your people power. The policy team (dedicated policy staff or staff with split roles) at your United Way should identify all of the individuals and institutions who support your work in general. Include board members, donors, and community partners. Create a list of individuals whom you can reach out to easily when you are engaging supporters in advocacy efforts.

Step two: imagine your potential supports. Consider who else has a stake in the success of your policy effort? This list becomes a broad identification of individuals and organizations that should or do care about what you are trying to accomplish. Be creative and inclusive in doing this base-building prospecting. If you have identified parents as supporters of a children’s health care initiative, don’t stop there. Include grandparents, siblings, teachers, and neighbors.

They, too, have an interest in your success.

Step three: target the existing and potential supporters you want to engage in your issue campaign. Think about your supporters and potential allies in terms of how much value they have for your work and how easily you can engage them. There is rarely the time or staffing to reach everyone who will applaud your work, so identify who will be most helpful to you and begin to reach out to that core list. Include in your outreach plans attention to the wards, districts, or regions where you will want to have constituents talking to their own elected officials and do some location-based targeting, too. For instance, if your study of the legislature has revealed that Senator Jones chairs the subcommittee on children’s health issues, be sure to seek supporters who are constituents in Senator Jones’s geographic area.

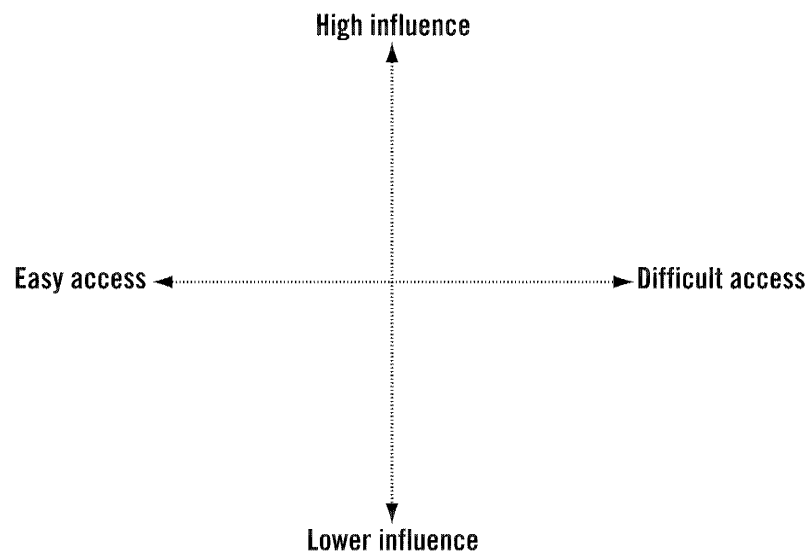
Exercise:

It is useful to take a systematic approach to expanding and prioritizing your potential list of supporters. Partners should engage in a brainstorming strategy that allows creative thinking.

1. Start by listing your supporters.
2. Next, identify others who will be interested in the success of your advocacy.
3. Then determine who you need. If you have key decision-makers who want to hear from

families whose children lack insurance, or workers who are struggling with the need for job training, how will you recruit those people as your advocates?

Place all of the possible supporters on a grid.



As you place potential supporters in the grid the ones you need the most and how easy or difficult it will be to access them will become clearer. You can use your resources efficiently to recruit the supporters whom you need and who are most likely to be on board with your work.

Basic organizing

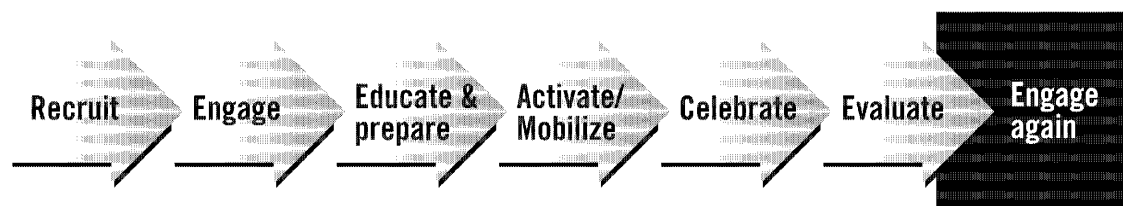
Organizing involves building relationships with people whose interests intersect with yours. Building relationships is the key element to successfully organizing your advocacy efforts. Once you have targeted the people who will care about your issue, who are likely to support it, and who can add to your effectiveness, you begin the art of recruitment.

Recruit: The best way to invite a person to lend her/his support to your work is to start with a conversation. The conversation, often one or two people meeting with the “target,” allows you to explain your interest and to explore your potential supporter’s interests, availability,

and willingness to work with you. If they agree with you, great! If they will make time to do meetings, calls, letters, or emails on your behalf, even better! If they have a strong desire to support your effort, that is best. A high level of commitment means that an individual will make your advocacy effort a priority and use her/his position and passion to advance your cause.

Like all advocacy work, organizing your supporters is an ongoing effort. Because you are involved in this work on an ongoing basis, you can continue to engage and activate supporters.

Organizing Actions



Organizing is an ongoing effort. Once you have identified and begun to recruit supporters, you need to engage them in activity that is valuable to your advocacy campaign and to their strengths and interests. You need to engage your base.

Engage: Strategic issue campaigns gain strength when you match your advocacy needs to the talents and interests of your advocacy team. Some of the people who support your United Way's advocacy efforts will bring experience to your board or policy committee. You benefit from recruiting people who know the ropes, the key leaders, and the process. Engage them in planning your campaign.

Others among your community supporters will have relationships that they are willing to leverage to ask for support for your policy positions. These leaders can be valuable ambassadors and spokespersons, and United Ways are uniquely able to invite supporters in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to be spokespersons for their issues. Ask recognized community leaders to be responsible for community education, to do one-to-one visits with opinion shapers and officials whom they know, to write opinion pieces for the media, and to be visible. For example, standing with you and participating in press conferences and providing legislative testimony.

While “grasstops” supporters have highly evolved relationships with decision-makers, your “grassroots” supporters – the service providers, the people served – have other strengths. They have the stories and experiences that interest decision-makers and the media. They also have the power of numbers, supporters from many political districts showing the breadth of support for your position and the multiplicity of examples

that create a compelling story.

Once you recruit a supporter, ask the individual or organization to do what they do best to advance your cause. You will then have engaged them in a way that highlights their leadership and provides them with a meaningful way to move your policy position forward.

Educate and inform: Too many organizations make the mistake of assuming that their supporters whom they have recruited are automatically ready to advocate on behalf of issues. Experience shows that to get the most effective advocacy when you mobilizing supporters, they need to not only know your position, but also be educated about the issue and the reasoning/data supporting your position. They also need to be up-to-date and informed about how the advocacy effort is proceeding. Some of the tactics that keep supporters prepared and ready for action include:

- Convenings. Bring supporters together to learn about the issue from experts and to hear how you use convincing messages to support your position on the issue.
- Helpful Materials. These can include background papers, fact sheets, responses to Frequently Asked Questions, and other information available as handouts. They can then be posted electronically for everyone to access.
- Talking points. Supporters will add their professional and personal reasons for supporting your position, but they should be able to present their ideas and stories within the context of the key messages for your campaign. Most people being asked to do calls or letters appreciate having some

of the key arguments prepared for them. This allows them to reinforce what other supporters have been saying and unify your communications. Most people are

comfortable if they can start with sample language and then add their personal perspective.

Example

Position statement– “I support full funding for early childhood programs. Support for early childhood programs is important to me, personally, because:

Sample talking points–

- We know from brain development research that children develop their language and cognitive skills in their early years.
- Research also shows that children who have supportive environments and development learning opportunities are ready to succeed in school and are most likely to finish school and be productive workers.

Consistent Updates: While decision-making processes are not always easy to plan, supporters need to know how your issue is progressing. As they understand the questions that are raised as the bill moves forward, the nature of any opposition and the arguments that are most influential, they can develop their own roles to maximize their impact. Additionally, staying informed keeps supporters connected to you and eager for action.

Opportunities to advocate: involving supporters in meetings with elected officials, including meetings held in conjunction with a “Day on the Hill,” provides an opportunity for them to develop their advocacy leadership, persuade decision-makers to support your point of view, and experience being at the heart of the action!

Clear expectations: Advocacy timelines: keep people informed about major benchmarks in the advocacy effort. Anticipate when you will need their participation and give them a realistic sense of how much time you will ask them to devote to this work and when. A supporter who gets an “action alert” email or call is likely to respond if he or she knows the issue, feels well prepared to comment on the issue, and has

been waiting for the call to action with time to schedule and prepare to participate.

Mobilize: If you have prepared your supporters well, if they have played a role that they want to play in your planning, advocacy, and outreach, they will be eager to respond to a call for action. It is important to distinguish between organizing and mobilizing. Organizing, as discussed here, is building long-term relationships based on shared interests in issues that require sustained involvement. Organizing builds social change movements. Mobilizing is only one component of organizing – the actual call to action. Mobilizing without organizing might get an excited response to a short-term need, but it won’t result in a strong and sustained base of supporters who will work collaboratively for the major policy changes that United Way envisions.

Celebrate. Any time that you reach an objective within your issue campaign it’s important to note that accomplishment. Sometimes the cause for celebration is a good turn out for legislative visits. Other times it is having your opinion editorial printed. Another time the celebration is because a bill passed in committee. Celebrations thank people and bonds them in this shared work. Success can’t be judged only on the accomplishment of a big goal. Too many factors in that success are outside of an organization’s control. Successes build on one another until the “big win” is possible, and marking achievements along the way with a cheer, a cake, a story telling session, honors the good work along the journey.

Evaluate. When the cheering quiets down and the cake is eaten, it makes sense to assess and document what worked well, what did not, why, and how to learn from the experience. Issue campaigns deserve to be well-documented.

“The Michigan Association of United Ways works with the Early Childhood Investment Corporation, a quasi-governmental agency that coordinates all programs affecting children. This entity pulled together all the groups that worked on early childhood. This level of coordination is important for messaging. We’ll confuse legislators if we’re not using the same language. This group worked on large scale joint messaging about the needs for early childhood programs rather than talking about defending individual programs. Let’s focus on the 95% we agree on, not the 5% we don’t. Let’s build groups that can support the larger cause.”

Scott Dzurka, President and CEO—
Michigan Association of United Ways.

A case study of the evolution of an advocacy effort allows you to share your accomplishment and the practical lessons learned about the value of strategies and tactics. The evaluation may motivate your donors and supporters because it demonstrates how much you did, win or lose, to build support for your position. It may invigorate your participants because it puts together the entire picture of the issue campaign. This allows each individual to see how his or her contribution to the effort made a difference. The evaluation is a tool that allows others to learn from the models that you created.

Reengage. Once your supporters have built their knowledge, commitment, excitement, and sense of connectedness to your policy position, keep them with you. One step leads to the next, and your United Way can build power and influence for the long-term by sustaining relationships and continued collaboration.

Remember:

The base that you build will continue to grow, to be a part of your long-term community impact work, and to build leadership. Organizing is the key to successful and sustained community impact.

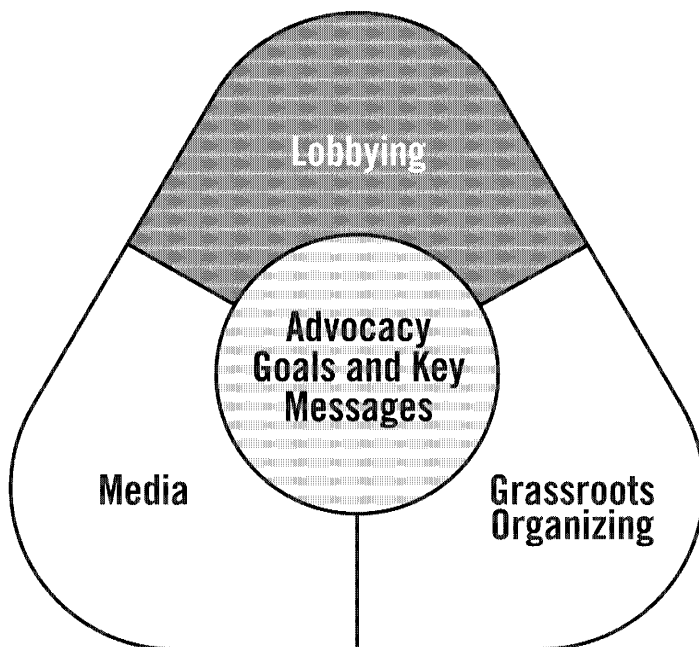
CHAPTER 5: LOBBYING FOR THE POLICIES YOU SUPPORT

Your public policy advocacy has grown from:

- Cementing the organization’s will to make public policy advocacy a priority; to
- Developing a policy advocacy plan that includes building your internal capacity to do advocacy work effectively and at a scale that works for your unique organization;
- Understanding the arenas in which your policies will be addressed;
- Joining your efforts to those of allied organizations; and
- Building the “grasstops” and “grassroots” support for your work throughout the community.

Keep in mind that your work in collaboration with neighboring United Ways, with the United Way State Association (if there is one in your state), and with United Way Worldwide will make you a more powerful voice. If your organizing and relationships with other United Ways is firm, you will be able to engage with elected officials in a unified, well-designed advocacy campaign. This approach enables your United Way to play a meaningful role, regardless of your size or location, in an overall effort to build the influence of United Way and to do effective lobbying.

In the advocacy framework, your organization is as ready as it needs to be. Working within the constellation of United Ways and other partners, you are clear about your shared policy goals, you have compelling messages, and you have organized your base. It is time for you and those with whom you are working to present your issue and your point of view to decision-makers and their staff.



Building Strategic Relationships

It is clear by now that much of advocacy and organizing is relational work and that strong relationships will enhance your chances of success in the short and long-term. There are several steps that will enable you to start building relationships with those who play an important role in decision-making on your issues. The core practices proposed here work

well at the state and local level. The more local the issue, the more likely it will be that you will already have some type relationship with the elected representative(s). This is an important component of the value that you bring to a shared United Way effort.

If you are joining an existing advocacy effort, many of the following steps may be accomplished by United Ways or community partners already involved in the issue. If you are initiating a policy discussion at the most local level or as the lead agency, these are important components of designing your lobbying tactics.

Identify the decision-makers who matter most. Given that most states have sizable legislatures, it may not be realistic to expect to have a strong working relationship with every member of your House (Assembly) or Senate. Targeting those who have the most power to advance your issue allows you to concentrate on the people you need most at the beginning of an advocacy campaign.

How do you determine who has power? Look for the following:

- The elected official has been selected to hold a **leadership** role: Speaker of the House, Majority Leader of the House, Minority Leader of the House, Majority Leader of the Senate, Senate President, or Minority Leader of the Senate. The terms may differ among the states, but these are the people who recruit and support candidates, organize the committee structures of the House or Senate, decide which issues are priority issues, and can invite their entire political caucus, majority or minority, to support or oppose your position. It is obvious that having leadership on your side paves the way for a higher likelihood of success.
- The legislators who have power and position on the committee or committees most likely to hear your bill, take testimony, debate it, and recommend that it pass or fail. **Committee and subcommittee chairs** are the ones who decide if and when your issue will get a hearing. They will decide if you or a representative from your

organization will be allowed to testify and for how long. If they don't like your issue, they are sometimes able to keep it from ever being considered. Since a bill is usually assigned to a committee as soon as it is introduced, legislative staff can be very helpful in showing you how to find out where the bill has been assigned and how many committees may need to act on it.

- The legislator(s) who is/are **champions for your position**. Bill authors are almost always champions for the bill, and it is easy to identify and approach them. Opponents may be identified because they have spoken against the issue or supported proposals contrary to yours.
- The legislator(s) who represent a district in which you live and work and provide services and programs. **You are their constituents** and they are responsible for knowing what is important to your organization and to the people in the district who care about the issue.
- Because every legislator gets a vote, you will likely want to contact as many members of the decision-making body as possible. For this effort, your base of supporters can expand your reach and connect elected officials to constituents – the most important connection of all.

Build relationships. Once you have narrowed the list of individuals with whom you need to spend time and be persuasive, it is helpful to build relationships before you have to ask for support for or against a proposed policy. Whenever possible, meet with your targeted elected officials prior to a legislative session or early in the session.

Before you make the effort to meet with an elected official, learn everything that you can about that individual. Your state or local government's website will give you biographical information, a listing of the elected officials'

committee assignments, and information about the proposals that she or he has offered in the past. You can gain additional information by searching the elected official's own website. Most form these as a way to facilitate ongoing communication with their constituents. Many have blogs. United Way Worldwide's Legislative Action Center (<http://www.capwiz.com/unitedway/home/>) also has information about federal, state, and local officials.

The more you know about the individual, the more easily you will be able to present your ideas and points of view in a convincing and relevant way. And it is also helpful if you understand the interests of the elected official's party and district. The party agenda and, above all, the interests in the district that elected the person, inform decisions.

One good model for starting that relationship is to invite the official to your organization's site. At an initial meeting, have a "kitchen table" discussion. Include a couple of staff and board members (including your issue experts) and someone who benefits from your work. Invite the elected official to see your space and perhaps programs in process, then sit down for a basic conversation. Tell the policy maker and/or staff a little about your United Way, what you do, who you serve, your mission, and highlights of accomplishments. Keep it short and interesting, and share only a few pages of information with highlights of your work and successes. Persuade the elected official of two things:

- Your organization is a valuable resource to the official. You have information and stories that will be helpful when they want to propose legislation or respond to issues that involve your expertise.
- You are an important part of the community and strengthen the community in ways that matter to the official and his or her constituents.

Once you have talked a little about your organization's accomplishments, invite the elected official to talk. Ask opening questions like, "What do you think will be the priority issues this year? What are the issues that you will be working on? What do you think about how our position will fare in debate?" A good advocate needs to be a good listener. The elected official and appropriate staff will help you to understand her or his values and priorities, and often you will find some common ground that you might not have known about. It should be no surprise that almost every elected official has some personal experience with family or constituents who have the same needs and experiences as the people served by your programs. Many of them have nonprofit experience and understand your organizational needs.

Repeat your eagerness to be a resource on your issues, and provide the elected official and her or his staff with contact information for your leaders and experts. Note that they are not always going to need you during regular business hours, but they may want to reach you when an issue is coming up for debate in the evening and they want information from you. It is important to remain flexible to allow for the most policy impact/influence.

Reinforce the relationship-building effort. Just like good fundraising, policy advocacy relies on good relationship management and ongoing relationship maintenance.

- **Ask**— how do they like to be contacted: office address and phone? Which email address? In the district or in the office? Each person has preferences. Learn them.
- **Thank**— send a thank you note for participating in the meeting or for his or her support.
- **Inform**— let them know that you will continue to keep them informed on your issue and that you will be contacting them for support/help in the future. Provide materials that you promised or that were requested.

Prepare to seek support. Once you have identified officials you'd like to target and their interests, then the persuasion can begin. Ideally your initial meeting (or annual meeting) will precede the formal decision-making and give you access to the elected official more easily. Having a supporter with you who is known and respected by the elected official can be very helpful in building comfort and trust. If the elected official has ongoing contact with someone in your base of supporters, plan to use that relationship to help you continue to have access to the decision-maker.

Lobby: With your well-defined issue, clear messages, and staff and volunteers who serve as able and respected messengers, you are ready to lobby. Here are the key elements of a lobbying exchange.

How do you connect and begin to talk? Ask to have a conversation with the elected official. A face-to-face conversation is best, either in the elected person's office or somewhere in the community when the decision-maker is in the district. Use that conversation to:

- explain your issue and position,
- demonstrate that your position has support from knowledgeable people and from constituents in the official's home district, and
- ASK for their support.

Who should be part of the lobby meeting? A lobbying meeting should not include a crowd, but it should reflect expertise and support. A knowledgeable staff person, a board member or volunteer who is recognized and respected by the official, and at least one constituent who is prepared to explain why the issue is important to them comprise an effective group for a lobbying meeting. Sometimes you will want to include members of supportive organizations. Sometimes you will want your best "ambassador" to go alone to use their professional or community connections to the elected official as a basis for a conversation.

Often an elected official will ask a staff member or intern to join the meeting and keep track of the information that you present.

Once you ask for support, how do you respond to the answer?

YES. When the person says yes: say thank you, but don't stop there. Ask supporters to help you by talking to their colleagues, by being prepared to speak in support of the position, and by advising you as the process goes forward.

NO. Some people will never agree with your position. Hope that there are only a few of these. If an elected official says no, respect that position. Ask if there is anything that would change their mind, just in case there is a chance of gaining their support. But if the response is a hard no, react with thanks for the conversation and the hope that there will be things to work on together in the future. Never get angry or argue. Never burn bridges. Lobbyists are always surprised that the enemy on one issue can be the strongest partner on another.

I DON'T KNOW/UNDECIDED. This is where you are likely to spend some time and have repeated contact. Sometimes elected officials say this when they mean "NO," but prefer not to turn you down. That said people sometimes do need more information, want to know that others are on board, need to see how others in their political party are leaning, or want to wait and see what they hear from other groups. This is a time to focus on getting answers to two questions:

What else does he/she need to know?

Who does he/she need to hear from?

If they answer these questions, your next steps are obvious. Get them the requested information. Try to provide the reassurance from the people they listen to that this is a good position to support.

Testify in support of your issue.

When a decision-making body is reviewing and debating a bill, organizations have an opportunity to state and explain their support or opposition to a proposal. Because policy proposals sometimes get their most extensive

scrutiny in committee hearings, you can strengthen your advocacy effort by providing testimony when bills are being heard. Here are some useful tips and tactics for providing testimony:

Note “ from Marcia Avner, *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, with permission from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and Fieldstone Alliance”

How to testify at a committee hearing

Committee testimony is one form of formal, strategic communication. Your lobbyist and the bill’s sponsors can help get you into a position to testify. You have already prepared your key messages as you developed your lobbying materials. Draw your testimony from your key messages. Make your testimony clear, brief, and compelling. Use real-life stories to make complex issues meaningful and personal. Here are some tips for testifying.

Prepare a formal statement of your position. Explain that position in clearly enumerated points. This can range from a one-page handout that is the most direct statement of your position to letters of support, press clippings, pictures, and artifacts.

Learn everything possible about the committee members. It is important to know the audience. And legislators are always pleased to be addressed by name.

Choose a person to provide your primary testimony. Choose someone who is articulate and convincing and has status within your organization or coalition. Your broad chair, executive director, or the staff person with the highest level of expertise may be more appropriate for this role than your lobbyist, who serves as “stage manager.” The organization needs its own best and most influential voice.

Provide an additional person or two to testify. Choose people who can state why they support your position and how they expect it to impact their lives or communities. If time is limited, include their stories in written form.

Respect committee protocols. Address the committee correctly (Madam or Mister Chair and Members of the Committee). Respect time constraints.

Anticipate questions and opposition. Research who opposes your position, why, and what they are saying about the issue. Assume that opponents, too, will have lobbied committee members and their staff. Assume that you will get requests to explain your facts. Also be prepared for questions driven by a different position or perspective on the issue. You and your legislative supporters should identify these potential questions and how you will address them. Write out the questions and answers to the best of your ability.

Rehearse. Critique. Revise.

Relax. Remember that you know more about your issue than almost anyone else in the process and you are prepared to make a case for something that matters. Square your shoulders, take a deep breath, and do your best.

Ask the committee members to vote in support of your position.

Increase your persuasive efforts: mobilize community advocates

Once your United Way has had initial lobbying contact, introduced your position, and asked for support, you have taken a big step in the ongoing conversation that you will have with some elected officials.

Keep the conversation going. After your immediate thank you note and follow up to the meeting with an elected official, continue to stay in touch. There are many ways to do this, and contacts can be formal and also by chance.

- **Keep adding information as it becomes available.** In your initial meeting with an elected official, you would have presented the issue, your position, and the reason for your position. You may have been asked a lot of questions: “What happens with this in other states?” “Who else supports this?” “Who opposes this and why?” “How much will it cost?” You can create materials, from a handy list of “Frequently Asked Questions” to a letter of support signed by all of your supporting United Ways and Community members. These remind the elected official of your issue, answer her or his questions, and prepare each person you reach to be prepared as a champion of your position.
- **Mobilize constituents.** Those who live in an elected official’s political/geographic district have the best access to those in political office. They are the voters who the official wants as supporters. This is a chance for even very small United Ways or grassroots groups to contribute to the effort in very important ways. If an important member of the elected body is in your district, you, the constituent, have a powerful voice that will reach that person. Never think that you are too small or inexperienced to matter. Many issue campaigns have succeeded only because elected officials heard stories and requests for support from their district. Every voice matters!

- **Use many communication tools.** There is some agreement that face-to-face meetings are most valuable, but legislators respond well to a host of other efforts. Each individual prefers a unique combination of approaches: personalized letters, phone calls from constituents and others with whom they have some relationship, email, online videos with story tellers or experts making the case, social media postings, tweets, e-newsletter updates, all have their place in lobbying communications.

- **Be flexible.** Prepare to remind the elected official of your issue and stance whenever you meet. Good lobbying takes place in grocery stores, at school concerts, at dog parks, and in informal drop in stops at an elected official’s office. Keep up the dialogue and continue to build increasingly strong and comfortable relationships with decision-makers.

Events and actions: United Ways can persuade elected officials to support their issues in respectful and effective ways. Some tried and true options:

- Host a “Day on the Hill,” or “City Council Day.” Make the experience a good one for supporters. Give them early notice, easy transportation, and a brief issue update and lobby training. Then stage a well-attended event at the Capitol, City Hall, or County board that conveys your message. These should be brief and powerful. Include a statement of the position that you support. Add a brief explanation of why this is important and should gain the support of others. Include a story of how the proposed policy change matters in someone’s personal experience. Then schedule legislative meetings set up so that constituents can hold brief meetings during which they identify themselves as constituents, reiterate the importance of the policy that you seek, and include information about why this matters to them.

- Hold a press conference. Your message and a show of support for the issue that people have organized around can attract media attention. This elevates attention to the issue among decision-makers. Some key ingredients of a good press conference are the focus on an issue that is news and is interesting to the more general public. Good visuals are a must! If your press conference has a known and respected group of leaders making statements about the importance of supporting your position, and if there are people in attendance who represent a broad component of the community, your story, told your way, will persuade decision-makers to respond to community pressure. Be sure to have written materials for the press and talking points for participants. Then be sure that decision-makers get copies of your press coverage: print media and online.
- Rally supporters. Rallies are risky business, but they can be effective at demonstrating support for an issue. They also create an opportunity for elected officials to stand with community members in support of important laws or funding decisions. Planning and discipline are key to a successful rally. Location, timing, sound systems, and suitable sized space for the group that will participate make the event a good one. Organizers of the event need to ensure that people participate in ways that are respectful and that will win support, not inspire opposition.
- Organize an email or call-in day. As the issue that you support gets close to the decision-making point, reminders to elected officials that the community cares can be helpful. It is apparent when a day of calls or emails has been orchestrated, but it also creates an opportunity for officials and their staff to count the supporters (and opponents) on an issue and factor that into their decision-making.

Reminders:

As you design and implement your lobbying effort, keep in mind that there are many people you want to influence. The decision-makers include legislative and executive branch leaders. Governors, Mayors, County Administrators, and Administrative Agency leaders all have power to influence your issue.

Cover all the bases, using many of the core approaches that are identified above:

- Remember, a lobbying exchange is part of an ongoing conversation. You do this all the time and can do it well in the context of lobbying.
- Identify the decision-maker. Then rely on your United Way's position in the community and your partners' standing to gain access to those who influence and those who decide.
- Present your position in clear and compelling ways. Support your position with both data and stories.
- Demonstrate that your position has support in the community and in the elected official's district. Include constituents and community leaders in your campaign.
- Involve as many partners as possible. Every United Way has something important to contribute, and United Way brings many partners to the table.
- Keep the conversation going. Many issues take a long time to gain momentum and to become part of the change that you seek.

Worksheet 3

Note “from Marcia Avner, The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations, with permission from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and Fieldstone Alliance”

Lobbying Strategies

- Identify non-profit allies, and work with them in efforts ranging from coordinated lobbying campaigns to formal coalitions to provide information on a shared priority.
- Research opposing viewpoints and be prepared to present the other side’s view to elected officials so that they can anticipate the points that will be raised in a debate.
- Testify in legislative hearings as expert witnesses.
- Work with legislators throughout the legislative process to amend proposals and find compromise positions that are reasonable and further your cause.

Other ideas:

- Persuade legislators to support your position.
- Carry out a strategy that will gain media coverage of your issue and positive messages in support of your position.
- Write letters and make phone calls to key decisions makers.
- Attend hearings and testify in support of your position.
- Involve people who are affected by the issue being debated; ask them to offer their stories and perspective in formal legislative testimony.
- Meet with committee members and leaders first and eventually, all members of the legislature—to persuade them to adopt your position based on the merits of the case and its importance to the people you serve.

Other ideas:

- Grassroots mobilizing strategies and tactics
 - Build your base of supporters.
 - Identify constituencies that will be affected by decisions about your issues.
 - Build lists of potential supporters, both individuals and organizations.
 - Educate potential supporters, both individuals and organizations.
 - Informational briefings
 - Newsletter articles
 - Special mailings
 - Individual conversations
 - Other:
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-

Invite potential supporters to sign on to your effort; as they do so, identify the actions they will take such a making calls, writing letters, meeting with legislators, writing letters to the newspaper, testifying, and participating in rallies.

Other ideas:

- Mobilize your supporters.
- Create an ongoing flow of information and updates on the progress of your policy efforts through mailings, fax, e-mail, newsletter, or web site postings. Include calls to action as appropriate.
- Maintain a system for asking supporters to act. Use phone calls, e-mail, fax and other alerts that explain which decision makers to contact, how to reach them, when to contact them, and what to say.
- Provide training for supporters in effective lobbying tactics.
- Create events that allow supporters to contact elected officials easily, such as “Day on the Hill” events or rallies.
- Ask supporters to allow reporters to interview them and use their experiences and concerns in media coverage of the issue.

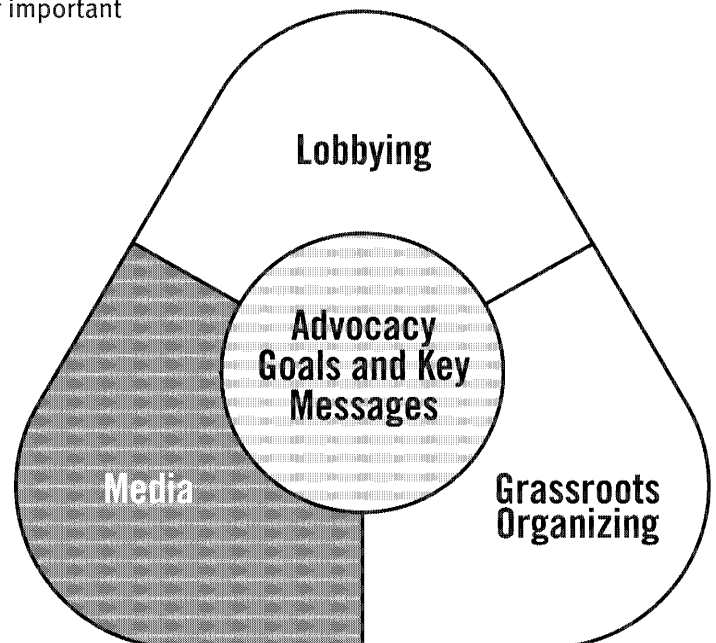
CHAPTER 6: MEDIA ADVOCACY: GETTING YOUR STORY TOLD YOUR WAY

Media Strategy

Your United Way and your partners should include a media communications plan in your issue campaign plan. Strategic media advocacy is much like the efforts to move your key messages in your lobbying and organizing work. But your media work can meet several particular objectives:

- Positive media coverage can move your message to the general public who may not know much about your issue or the reasons for United Ways' position on the issue. Your reach is expanded.
- Pro-active media, especially news or feature stories that identify the importance of your policy position to meeting real needs for the policy, shore up your position and frame it in a favorable way.
- Elected officials keep careful track of news, especially statewide or very local coverage of issues that impact their political districts. Any elected official who doesn't follow the letters to the editor in her or his local daily or weekly paper, and blogs about policy issues, and talk radio, is missing important constituent feedback!
- Materials that can be circulated in a printed format serve as valuable handouts in your lobbying effort. In the press, a more neutral voice than your own lends some credibility and support to your point of view.
- Some forms of media can generate a public dialogue (online, on the air, in newspapers) that raises the visibility of the issue.
- News coverage, when done well, makes your efforts visible and enriches the brand of the United Ways and partners involved. (Share the glory. It serves your organization well to share credit for accomplishments with elected officials, partners, community leaders who have been part of the effort.)

Nonprofits are able to do paid media, working with public relations firms, purchasing television or radio time, running ads. But for most nonprofit organizations, "earned media" is the approach of choice. It is not only low-cost, no-cost; it allows for timely media interactions and invites the participation of broad numbers of community members.



Prepare: be media ready

Identify and create a description of the role of a media coordinator. In addressing your internal capacity, or the collective capacity for media work that you and your partners share, designate one person to be the media coordinator. This person serves as the person responsible for getting the planned media work done well and in a timely way, identifying media opportunities, recruiting and helping to prepare key spokespersons, and doing necessary follow up with people of the press. She or he need not be the primary spokesperson for the issue campaign, but serves as a media manager.

Prepare media messages:

- Have clear statements about the issue. Include the need that you are working to address. State your position clearly. Justify that position with brief and strong statements.
- Share good information about the people or communities that are experiencing the need for a new policy and the intended impact of your position. Use a mix of facts and stories to ensure that your information is evidence based and also has a human face.
- Shape messages to include the interests of the media outlet's intended audience. If it is a community or campus newspaper, talk about the local implications of the debate and your proposal. If it is statewide, use statewide facts and figures and stories that represent a range of communities.
- Select the best spokesperson for each media contact. Often there is one key spokesperson for the whole campaign. Even in this instance, the local press will want some input from local leaders. Sometimes board members or business allies or the community beneficiaries of the proposed policy will be the best match for the particular medium. Be sure that all of your official spokespersons are prepared on message and coached or trained, as needed, in message delivery! Practice is good.

Develop your own list of the questions or challenges that may be raised. Preparing an answer to the questions you anticipate allows your team to present consistent messages and

prepare any facts or figures needed to respond to opposition.

Target media that will accomplish your goals.

Match the message to the audience. Determine which media reach that audience.

- List the audience that you want to reach.
- Determine which media reach those audiences
- Who are the best people within the media to understand your issue's importance
- Set priorities
- Reach out to the media: ask for a meeting

Build media relationships. There is an underlying theme in all of the discussion of advocacy work in this handbook: the relationships are essential. This is true of media work as well as lobbying and building a base. (And it is exactly what you do in fundraising!) To build the relationships with the media, keep an updated list of the media outlets in your area, key members of the press who cover your issues, and social media networks that follow and create dialogues about public policy issues.

Follow the news. One of the best ways to build your media list is to read, listen, and search the internet. You will learn who specializes in health care, children's issues, pre-school education, and other topics. Those people become a top priority for your media outreach. They may be news reporters, feature writers, columnists, commentators, or editorial board members. If they know and care about your general policy area, they need to learn that you are a resource to them and have information that they need. They will be the ones assigned to cover your work at state or local policy arenas.

Talk to the media. Give them background information on the issue. Give them clear statements of your position and rationale. Be useful. Be available. Some may already know of your experience, expertise, and standing in the community, many may not. Keep up with existing relationships, but given the turnover in media and the consolidation of some news outlets, it

is important to be alert to who covers what and how. Whether you are working with a statewide newspaper or radio station or your local weekly paper, tune in to who covers what – online, on the air, in the newsstands.

Common sense guidelines to media work:

- Provide interesting and timely information. Keep in mind the audience they reach. Why should their readers/viewers care about your issue? What makes your work compelling? How does it fit into other coverage they are doing of related issues or the general work of the city, county, or state? Media people will tell you repeatedly that they need a “news hook!”
- Stay accurate, clear, and reliable as a news source. Seek out the press when you have news or unique information. They are, in general, too short of staff to seek you out unless they need your input for a story.
- Maintain integrity. Build trust. “Fool” them once and they won’t want to work with you again.
- Be respectful of their deadlines, staffing limitations, and target audiences. When you aren’t sure, ask for the best times to reach them and the best ways to deliver information. If you are planning a press conference, give as much notice as possible. If the local paper has limited staff, take pictures of your event that they can use. Make interesting spokespersons available to them at the time and place they prefer.
- Be responsive. When policy debates get intense, you have the right to ask for some time to prepare an answer when they call with questions. But, get back to reporters quickly and with clear responses. Keep in mind that what they often want is a short quotation. Other times they may want background information to help them understand an issue.
- Be savvy about media work. When working with a member of the media, formal or social media, understand that anything you say may be used. “Off the record” is rarely for sure.

- Don’t say anything you don’t want to see online, find in a tweet, hear on the radio, or read in the paper.

Media messages and media events

- Press releases and media advisories

A media advisory is a brief notice to the press, usually sent by email or dropped off at press offices at city hall, the county courthouse, or the state legislature. These invite the press to “hold the time” and come to a press conference or other event that you are sponsoring.

A press release is a more detailed description of your key messages. It has enough detail, quotes, and information to stand alone as a press story with your perspective. These are extremely useful to all types of journalists. For a local newspaper, this may be the story they print. For a major news outlet, they know what you are saying and whom to contact for more direct discourse. Often those covering a story, from statewide newspaper journalists to bloggers, will use the quotes in your press release as part of a bigger story that they are weaving together.

Key elements of media advisories and press releases are that they must include who you are, the date, the time and place of any event you are highlighting, and a contact person who can be reached at any time. Really. Any time. Members of the media work on stories 24/7.

Study examples. A good way to understand how to do compelling media work is to look at an example. Tony Ross, President of United Way of Pennsylvania, coordinated a powerful advocacy campaign in 2009 when the Pennsylvania state legislature couldn’t reach a budget agreement and all state monies were frozen. As the following materials reflect, the impact on programs and communities statewide was devastating. Review the press release included here and note how complete the message is, how newsworthy the issue is, and the details that enable the members of the press to use information and quotes included here.



United Way
of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Civic Leaders Call For an End to State Budget Impasse With Fair Budget

Business, Nonprofit, Labor and Religious Leaders Ask Policymakers to “Advance the Common Good” at United Way event.

CONTACT: Megan Smith, 717-238-7365 or msmith@uwp.org,

HARRISBURG, Sept. 15 – The United Way of Pennsylvania (UWP) released a statement signed by over 100 Pennsylvania civic leaders which urges an immediate passage of a fair and responsible budget.

Pennsylvania is currently the only state in the nation that has not adopted a General Fund budget for the current fiscal year. The letter to Governor Rendell and all 253 members of the General Assembly is signed by members of the Commonwealth’s business, labor, and nonprofit communities.

“As civic leaders in our Commonwealth, we are strongly urging you to move quickly to resolve the current budget impasse and adopt a state budget for Fiscal Year 2009-10 that keeps our families working and our children in safe, quality child care and education programs that build a brighter future for all of us,” said Bob Haigh, volunteer with the United Way of the Capital Region.

The United Way system across Pennsylvania represents more than half a million individual and corporate donors who support initiatives to improve education, financial stability and the ability to connect people to services through prevention, education and early intervention.

Last month, UWP conducted a survey of over 500 organizations from all 67 counties. The survey showed that due to the current budget impasse, 64 percent of agencies are relying on reserves to continue operations while 28 percent are utilizing lines of credit. The remaining agencies have no reserves or are relying on donations and fees to continue services.

“The capacity of non-profits to ‘front money’ for the Commonwealth is limited, and the day of reckoning is coming quickly or already has arrived for some,” said UWP President Tony Ross.

In addition to the statewide survey, several local United Ways have conducted research on the impact of the budget stalemate on their respective communities. Examples of the negative impacts include:

OVER

York County

Since July 31, 2009, their programs are owed over \$5 million. Of this funding, over \$2 million is for direct services to clients and another \$1.4 million is used to support early childhood education programming.

Lackawanna County

In the past month, nearly \$900,000 in child care subsidies through the state Child Care Works program has not been paid to 247 day care providers, putting 1,900 children at risk of losing services. The waiting list to receive subsidized child care has increased from three months to at least six.

Southeastern Pennsylvania

- 1 in 3 agencies have no source of money to help them through this period (including no credit line remaining or reserves)
- 1 in 3 agencies have already reduced or eliminated services; 2 in 3 project they will do so by September 30.

“If this impasse is not resolved soon with a fair and responsible budget, many agencies will be forced to close their doors, leaving thousands of seniors, children, families, the homeless and others with nowhere to turn for help,” said Gary Drapek, President of United Way of Lackawanna and Wayne Counties.

The loss of the nonprofits across the Commonwealth will not just affect those receiving direct services. The budget impasse is resulting in both layoffs and missed payments to local vendors.

“While nonprofits are not in the business of financial gain, they are still businesses in every other sense -- they employ people, they take in revenues, they produce goods and services and contribute in significant ways to Pennsylvania’s economic stability and growth,” said Bill McKinney, President- United Way of the Laurel Highlands.

At the rally, civic leaders also called for expedited payment of agencies once a budget agreement is reached. They also asked rank and file legislators to push legislative leaders and the administration to reach a fair compromise quickly.

After the press conference, attendees hand delivered the letter to lawmakers and administration officials.

Over 27 media outlets covered the press conference and many used the press release information as their primary resources. Set in the context of a statewide debate, United Way

had coverage throughout Pennsylvania and positioned itself as a leadership coalition and statewide association that could speak for all parts of the state.

Press events

Partners working on an issue can raise the visibility of the issue with press events. These can be the “kick off” to a day on the hill, a stand alone event at a time when the debate on the issue is impending and generating interest. Press conferences are intended to bring new and timely news to reporters, especially those responsible for governmental issues. Many groups stage these, so your issue campaign needs to determine if you have something to add to the existing debate. Sometimes you may announce a new proposal. Other times you may announce that you can demonstrate extraordinary support for your issue. United Way of Pennsylvania had a statewide signed by over 150 Pennsylvania civic leaders, statewide United Way directors and board members, that was part of their press conference help to urge rapid passage of a state budget.

Components of a good event include:

- A convincing press alert to get the media to the event
- A location that is easy for the press to reach. Most state capitols have space where nonprofits can hold press conferences and the press corps are used to joining press conferences in that space
- Trusted and interesting speakers. Sometimes who delivers the message is the news. If a new or unexpected major partner – a former Governor, a famous celebrity, and corporate executive, a faith-based coalition – is joining your cause, they should have a role in telling the press why this is important to them.

- Provide written information. A press packet can include your press release, any background materials (brief), and other supportive materials, including letters of support. Less is more. Provide materials that get to the point and support your case that a press person can scan or read quickly.
- Keep it brief. Other issues and people are competing for time, and if you can make your point in under 15 minutes, that is helpful. Your press alert can promise a length.
- Include one speaker who introduces your reason for calling the press conference, a speaker who makes your major announcement , e. g. “We are hear to represent a statewide call to settle the budget crises now. The delay is hurting United Ways and community partners statewide.” And then have someone who can tell a short story about the impact of the problem and an expert who can present facts and figures to support the case.
- Rehearse. Time your program. Revise. Rehearse again.
- Leave time for questions from the press. The person who does the introduction of the press conference’s purpose and the speakers should control the situation by repeating each question and asking the appropriate speaker to respond. Use the work that you have done to anticipate questions to prepare.

- Have visual appeal. Most media want pictures. A group of people, perhaps some wearing T-shirts with your key message, provide a backdrop. Props that include facts and figures are useful. Sometimes a little theater works wonders if it is tasteful and truthful. One state had a 6 ft tall Styrofoam outline of the state. It was carved into puzzle pieces. The pieces were labeled in bright colors: “health care,” “education,” early childhood,” “housing,” “environment,” etc. In a press conference, the group showed that a state budget needs to include all of the components of quality of life that communities depend on. They got cameras rolling when they pulled out one piece of the puzzle and the state fell apart...literally.

Media work is an important strategy for nonprofit advocacy. Scale your effort to the nature of your issue campaign, and then be as pro-active as possible. Your goal should be to establish your policy position and your shared leadership position on the issue and to be included as spokespersons and experts on the issue. The media work enriches your organizing to expand your base, since people will see and hear about your issue and leadership. Elected officials will be aware of the press coverage of your work.

Use this checklist of media activities to inspire your own thinking about what will work best for you.

Worksheet 4

Note “from Marcia Avner, *The Lobbying and Advocacy Handbook for Nonprofit Organizations*, with permission from the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and Fieldstone Alliance”

Media Advocacy Checklist

Use this checklist to track to development of a media advocacy plan.

- Organizational Assessment:
- Does your organization have a media strategy?
- Is the media plan discussed as part of the over all lobbying plan?
- Do you revise the media plan on a regular basis as your lobbying campaign evolves?

Organizational Infrastructure:

- Do you have a staff person who is responsible for carrying out the media plan and coordinating all the media efforts in your organization?
- Do you have a planning calendar of key lobbying events? Are media goals and plans included in the lobbying planning calendar?
- Has your organization identified its primary, formal spokespersons?
- Do your spokespersons need media training and preparation? Have you determined how they will get it?
- Have your board and staff prepared a plan for “rapid response” to an opportunity or a crisis that presents itself with little warning? Is there a “team” that can respond quickly?
- Is the chain of decision making for media statements clearly designated and understood by everyone within the organization?
- Does your public policy budget have a media component?

Media Systems:

- Are your media lists up-to-date, complete with names of editors, reporters, or producers for all media outlets you plan to use?
- Do you know deadlines, work hours, and preferred communications modes for key people who work on your public policy issues?
- Do your lists distinguish types of coverage: news, feature, editorial, columns, and calendars? Do you have a clipping file for all relevant media coverage and for a complete record of coverage of your organization’s work?
- Are you in regular contact with the editor and reporters you have designated as key contacts?

Is your information media ready?

- Do you have accurate, concise, interesting information about your organization-its mission, history, programs, and services?
- Have you shaped a clear message and talking points for the policy issue you plan to raise?
- Have you held introductory meetings with members of the press who are likely to cover your organization and issues?
- Do you maintain an information base that is valuable resource to the press, including data, stories, and a portfolio of real people who are willing to talk to the press?

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY

Your United Way can advance its public policy work by basing its planning and action on a few key principles:

- Public policy engagement is a critical component of United Way impact work.
- Every United Way has something of value to add to policy work: information, stories, advocates, and the power to reach important elected officials in their area.
- United Ways often begin their advocacy work with the advantage of high visibility, trusting partners, and relationships with community leaders.
- Building power to accomplish desired changes requires working together. United Ways, their partners in the community, and the potential supporters whom you recruit and engage can advance issues that matter to your communities and to your organizations' long term sustainability.
- You can do long term effective advocacy that results in the policy changes that you seek if you plan well and use the tools that work: lobbying, organizing, and media advocacy.

- Recognize that public policy work enhances your leadership role in the community.

The best way to begin this work, or to reenergize this work, is to commit to investing time, talent, and resources, and to follow a planning process that engages your leadership.

In an action oriented strategy. There are many resources available for supporting you in the work. United Way Worldwide has an active website that will keep you up to date and inspired. Additional materials and information about the lobby law is available at the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest, www.clpi.org or The Alliance for Justice, www.afj.com. Your best resources may already be on board: the information, alliances, and knowledge that you already have as an organization.

To meet your goals in the local community and United Way goals in addressing education, economic, and health challenges, get ready, get set, and GO!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful for the support of others in the development of this handbook. Steve Taylor and United Way Worldwide's Public Policy Team are working to engage all United Ways in advocacy at the state and local level. This handbook is one component of their strategy for supporting United Ways in building and advancing their advocacy work.

Advocates within the United Way network have been generous with their experiences and ideas. Thanks to: David Arons, American Cancer Society-Minnesota and Board Member, Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest; Michelle

Basham, Genesis II, a United Way agency, Judy Darnell, State Advocacy Director for United Way of California; Scott Dzurka, President and CEO for Michigan Association of United Ways; Jeannie Fox, Deputy Policy Director, Minnesota Council of Nonprofits; Ann Mintz, Policy Director for United Way of Metro Atlanta; Tony Ross, Vice President of Public Policy and Communications for United Way of Pennsylvania; and Jason Sabo, Senior Vice President of Public Policy for United Way of Texas.

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