



# GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY



A grassroots movement is a collective action by community members to effect change at the local or national level. Here are some basic steps to help your campaign efforts:

## ▶ **Identify the Issue**

Identify the need or problem you want to address.

## ▶ **Develop a Strategic Plan**

Having a specific goal makes it easier to determine the precise steps needed to achieve it. In addition, a specific goal is more measurable. Map out the steps it will take to achieve your objectives and reach your goals and develop a written action plan.

## ▶ **Build a Coalition**

In order to maximize your grassroots efforts, coalition-building is very important. There is strength in numbers. If legislators are receiving a large number of phone calls, letters, e-mails and in-person meetings advocating your position, they are more likely to give your issue and your position greater consideration than if they receive no communication at all. Work with coalition partners to amplify your voice.

## ▶ **Material Development**

Develop easy-to-read fact sheets, infographics and/or memos with data on the issue(s) supporting your position(s).

## ▶ **Identify Decision Makers**

Identify the people and/or institutions that have the power to make the change you are seeking. If you are trying to win passage of a law, identify the people who will determine whether or not you will succeed.

## ▶ **Evaluate Relationships**

Evaluate the existing relationships that you or members of your coalition can use to influence decision makers.

## ▶ **Use of Media**

Media (print, digital, social) can help advance your agenda and make the case for support or opposition to proposed legislation. Use any opportunity you have to incorporate media into your strategy and tap into a wider audience.

## ▶ **Determine Resources**

Other items to consider when organizing at the grassroots level are what resources (e.g., financial, hiring of staff) are needed to accomplish your goal.

## ► Educate Elected Officials

While a legislator may be an expert on one or two issues, it is impossible for every lawmaker to master every issue likely to come before them. Elected officials rely on staff, outside expertise and constituent input to effectively represent the people of their district or state. An ongoing dialogue with your elected officials is the best way to ensure they understand how their decisions will impact their constituents back home. It is important to build a relationship with your legislators not just contact them when legislation is pending. Offer your expertise and counsel so they seek your input when an issue arises.

### • Calls, Letters, and Emails

Focus on one or two issues. Explain your position clearly and concisely. If the issue is complicated, attach additional material and your telephone number so the staff can call you if additional information is needed. Share your personal experience or use real-life examples to illustrate your points.

### • Meetings

Most members of Congress and state legislators schedule meetings with constituents. Call the local office to find out when your elected official will be in town and ask for a meeting.

If you are trying to set up a meeting on behalf of a group, be sure to let the scheduler know how many people you expect to attend. Ideally it should be a relatively small group representing a diversity of constituent groups and interests.

Keep in mind that the schedule of an elected official is frequently changing, and you may end up meeting with staff rather than the legislator. Staff members may in fact be more familiar with the details of an issue and may have more time to spend hearing your views.



### Preparation for Visit

- Do enough research to understand the legislator's interests, positions and voting record on the issue you are advocating for.
- Anticipate the kinds of questions or concerns that will be raised and have clear answers ready.
- Know your message.
- Prepare materials to leave behind with the legislator or staff, such as fact sheets, infographics or a memo summarizing your position(s).



### During Visit

- All attendees "briefly" introduce themselves and their agency, and what their involvement is with the issue(s). If there are more than 3 people in the meeting, determine who will open and close the conversation. Note: Most meetings last approximately 15 minutes.
- Start on a positive note by finding some common ground. For example, thank your legislators if they are noted as Sponsors/Co-Sponsors to bill(s) or highlight an event you attended that the legislator participated.
- Clearly describe the issue(s) and your position early in the discussion. This is key if your meeting is cut short due to a pending vote or committee hearing.
- Use personal anecdotes. Explain your position with facts and use personal stories when possible; make sure legislators understand the personal ramifications or benefits resulting from their actions.
- Stay focused. Avoid overloading the legislator with too much information. Keep the conversation simple and polite.
- If you don't understand something, ask for an explanation.
- Have the legislators clarify their position and/or vote on the issue(s).
- Show openness to counterarguments and politely respond to them if it seems appropriate to do so.
- Firmly and fairly direct the conversation, especially if the conversation begins to veer off track.
- Ask the legislator to take some specific actions: sponsoring a bill, or voting for/against a pending measure.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, but offer to get an answer.
- Summarize any commitments made by the Member/staff.
- Thank them and ask when and with whom you should follow up.



### After the Visit

- Write a thank you letter summarizing priority points.
- Maintain ongoing communication with legislators and their staff through letters, emails, or calls.
- Find out when legislators will be back in their home district and organize a local meeting.