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8 Steps for Effective Advocacy

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Overview

Advocacy is also used for spreading awareness of an issue, and gathering supporters to contact their legislators in support or opposition of an issue (e.g., abortion after birth). These supporters assist those involved in attempting to change current policies or statutory laws to better the development of an industry or geographic location – from local governments to international groups. For instance,

If you do not participate in grassroots movements, the audience will not hear your organization's viewpoint allowing decision makers to make decisions without taking your view into account. Following this path may cause detrimental harm to the way your business operates or even its future.

At every level from local to state and national to international, you will want to engage with the media, elected officials, non-government organizations (NGOs), and various government and non-profit organizations.

So, how should your company advocate? You can advocate within the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. Within the legislative branch, you can attend meetings, provide comment on legislation that will impact you and your business, and provide testimony, if called upon. As for the judicial branch, you can inform the media and collect and provide public opinion. Finally, you can engage the executive branch by meeting with various agencies and commenting on applicable regulations.

Ignoring advocacy within your strategic plan could cause your company to spend unnecessary to fund unwanted programs, increase your liabilities astronomically due to new regulations that apply to your operations, increase the amount of time it takes to get supplies from your vendors and other groups, and increase the time it takes to get your products or services to your customers. All of these will impact your bottom line (i.e., profitability).
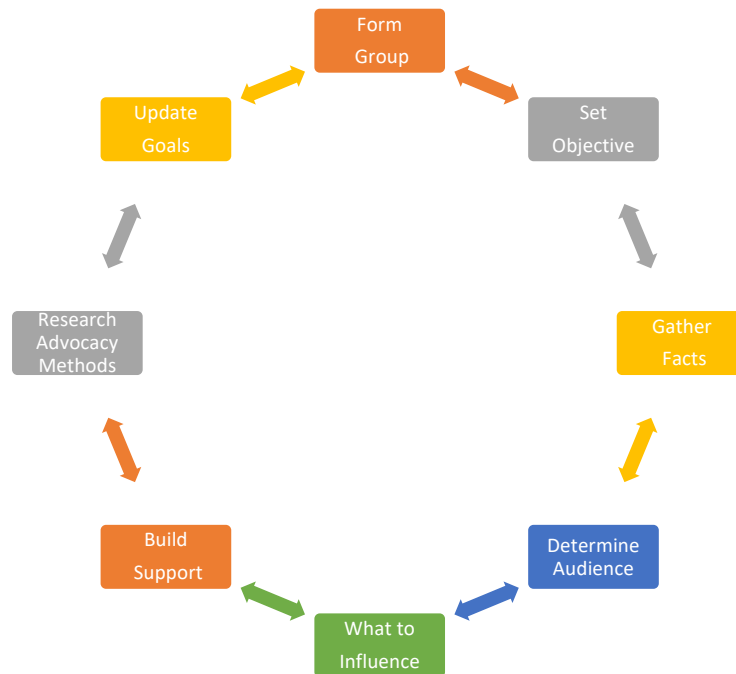
Figure 1: Advocacy Cycle

Step 1: Form a Group

1. ***The first step in the advocacy cycle is to conduct searches to determine those individuals with a common interest or behavior towards your achieving your goal.***

The first filter you want to use to narrow your search is gender. At times, it is possible for men and women, to have a different views on a policy issue. However, most of the time, men and women have the same views allowing you to target both genders. In normal situations, it is best to have a mix of both men and women. Depending upon the topic you want to change, you may want a higher percentage of one gender than the other gender.

The next filter you will want to use is ethnicity. As with the gender filter, you should find a mix of all ethnicities. However, depending on the policy issue, you may want to have a higher percentage in one group than the other groups.

Another filter to use is different age groups, because different generations have differing views on topics of public interest. Typically, the older generations are more conservative, while the younger generations are more socialistic. This means that the generations have may feel differently about different causes and concerns.

You may also want to filter education depending on the cause or concern you want to address. For example, you probably do not want individuals with no college experience weighing in on national security issues or energy. However, you may want to include those without college education to weigh in on how the average person feels about our nation's national security and energy. For example, you may find individuals without college degrees that have worked in the military or the energy industry.

Language barriers could present challenges. However, finding a translator could eliminate this barrier, and allow for individuals of different ethnicities may prove useful. If you cannot find a translator within your organization, you could hire an outside translator for a nominal fee. If you are not interested in finding a translator in either place, you should filter on language to find those that speak your native language. This is important for any focus groups, surveys, or other means of obtaining the customer's voice to ensure all views are heard.

It is important to research non-governmental organizations, non-profit organizations, and other organizations to determine if any of their goals and objectives align with the goal you aim to achieve. This will allow you to join a partnership or joint venture to increase your grassroots movement in hopes of achieving your goal.

Finally, you may want to filter by occupation. For example, you may not want to have someone in the counterterrorism field within a focus group for improving a human resources objective.

2. ***Have the group meet to discuss and document common goals***

As discussed in Step 1, it is very important to ensure you hear every voice (i.e., position) on your view to achieve your goal. If you do not want to invest in a translator, ensure everyone in the group speaks the same language

   a. Introduce everyone
   b. Develop next steps and assign any action items

Step 2: Set the Objective

3. ***It is important to develop a common goal from the action items and common goals.***
   a. Ensure the objective is sound.
   b. It is also important to make sure the goal is obtainable.
   c. It is also important that everyone agree on the goals and objectives.

Step 3: Gather the Facts

1. ***Analyze the situation to support the sound goals and objectives.***
   a. Ensure the objective is sound.
   b. It is also possible to read up on relevant and pertinent information to support your claim.
   c. Create a background paper
      i. This will document the analysis and other information that supports your claim.

Step 4: Determine the Audience

1. ***A major milestone in this step is to determine who has the authority to make the change. This could include more than one person, as illustrated below.***
2. ***In this step, you will determine who you are trying to influence***

      a. Local Government
            i. Mayor
            ii. City Counsel
            iii. Board of Supervisors
      b. State Government
            i. Governor
            ii. State Legislature
            iii. State Judicial System
      c. National Government
            i. President
            ii. Congress
                1. House
                2. Senate
            iii. Supreme Court

3. ***Tailor the strategies based on the decision maker(s).***
4. ***Person may need influenced directly or indirectly***
      a. This is a crucial and difficult step
            i. What will influence the decision maker(s)
                1. Gain public support
                2. Bettering reputation
                3. Gaining funding
                4. Forming alliances

Step 5: Determine What You Should Influence

1. ***Understand the constraints and context of your goals and objectives.***
      a. This includes the timing of the decision
      b. Focus on a previous decision and timing based on a similar proposal.
      c. At times, advocates may not have this data, and they have to submit their objective to go on the agenda

Step 6: Build Support System

1. ***This support system may include alliances and coalitions.***
      a. Working together is key, as there is strength in numbers.
      b. Pros:
            i. Different groups have different perspectives, as previously mentioned
                1. Identify strengths and limitations
                2. Respect one another's views
            ii. New ideas
            iii. Resource / Information sources
            iv. Contact donors
            v. Community outreach
            vi. Expertise in matter

Step 7: Advocacy Methods

1. ***Common methods***
   a. Writing letters
   b. Making phone calls
   c. Public education
      i. Fact sheets
      ii. Articles
      iii. Reports
      iv. Speaking events
   d. Meet with relevant decision makers
      vii. Some tips
         1. Be persistent in meeting with decision makers
         2. Clearly identified agenda
         3. Prepared with specific requests
         4. Identify a spokesperson to deliver background and rationale
         5. Show extent of support. Remember there is strength in numbers
         6. Encourage an open dialogue
         7. Use print and digital media
         8. Use social media

Step 8: Review and Adjust Goals and Objectives

1. ***It is important to adjust goals and objectives throughout advocacy process.***
   a. Continue to schedule meetings to keep advocacy group together