METHODOLOGY OF ADVOCACY
AND CAMPAIGNS

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS

REGIONAL ROMA EDUCATIONAL YOUTH
ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

Anyone has the power to make a positive change by taking action, and community advocacy campaigns can help groups to make a larger difference than they could have done by themselves. Advocacy campaigns have become more creative and elaborate nowadays. New grassroots advocacy groups require to train themselves on the basics of advocacy work to find a voice in the civil society. Advocacy happens in many stages, is managed by many different groups and can bring change through many different methods. Campaigns for advocacy may initially seem complex and it's crucial to recognize where your organization stands before starting your campaign. For nonprofits grassroots groups and associations who want to launch an advocacy campaign, this methodology aims to answer and clarify crucial questions that new activists might have and give direction on how to arrange your campaign.

2. What is Community Campaigning?

Community campaigns are organized and coordinated activities aimed at bringing political change and raising awareness about issues and matters on state, national or local level.
The majority of (advocacy) campaigns are initiated by few leaders who assemble a greater mass of supporters. These leaders are in charge of approaching elected functionaries and officials and holding rallies to keep the public posted about the policies they strive to change. Lobbyists are commonly a small group of people that speak for larger businesses or organizations. Lobby is a process which is also part of advocacy, and it happens when representatives of formal or non formal organizations try to influence government decisions or even ask an elected functionary to vote a certain way on a legislative proposal.

Grassroots activists lead movements created of citizens with the aim to lobby elected functionaries and change public opinion more broadly. Community campaigns are often initiated by citizens that have reviewed and are critical of specific policies. These movements usually have to work with very little funding. Some grassroots organisations receive funding from international organisations or trusts and foundations.

Advocating/Campaigning on local level on behalf of a specific community can bring positive change, consisting of:

- Leaving a footprint in your local community. When thinking about a wide-ranging issue, leaving a mark may seem unachievable. Yet, community advocacy can make an impact by targeting relevant local issues, resolving problems in your community or neighbourhood.

- Establish links in your community. Community advocacy is robust when the whole community stands behind a campaign, and leading an advocacy campaign can eventually reunite your community. If you want to establish a new advocacy organisation, a well-led community advocacy campaign can be a firm beginning of establishing links and connections on local level that will more likely bring success in the next campaign.

- Give guidance to your local community on how to advocate for itself henceforward. Providing the fundaments for a grassroots movement is probably the hardest part of community campaigning and advocacy. Nevertheless, after setting the cornerstone, you will put your community in a better position to advocate for itself on future issues. To a large extent community advocacy and campaign is about creating a link/bridge between community members and their local authorities. Your (organisation's) attempts can highlight important matters and issues and can aid to transfer them to policymakers, emboldening your community and creating a better local climate.

Can everyone advocate/campaign?

From government officials to individual citizens, community advocacy requires the support of a broad range of individuals and groups. By giving your organisation the duty to be a community advocate, you will bear a larger responsibility than a regular supporter.

Although anyone can be a community advocate, there are specific competences and resources the staff should own before starting a campaign.

For instance, launching a campaign needs communication skills, leadership, and strong listening skills, as you will have to be able to act on behalf of the individuals affected by the issue you're advocating for. You should be able to deliver their problems and concerns in a compelling manner to a local or national government official.

To run a successful community campaign means to be able to confirm that your organization is updated about the issues you should be advocating for. For that matter, there are several steps and tips to comprehend the information and contribute on local level.

1. Survey your community.

What kind of topics and concerns your community aims to address? While striving to launch a community campaign you most probably have some directions or presumptions about which matters can be improved in your community. Whatsoever, before making any move on these issues, the best step would be to assess and survey your community to validate that there will be extensive support in favour of your campaign.

The technique of surveying the community will help your organisation to obtain a profound perception of the daily dilemmas, principal values and beliefs of the community. Usually, the issues of the community are complicated and obtaining numerous viewpoints will give insights that should shape the campaign's core values and direction. The canvassing initiative method can be useful for tracking down the issues concerning your community.

Canvassing means to physically cover the territory of your city with the aim of finding out how different individuals from different areas of your community feel about a current local issue. The efficacy, efficiency, and effectiveness of canvassing your campaign can be boosted by going digital and creating social media platforms for this aim. Instead of equipping volunteers with clipboards, you can also use digital devices such as tablets with canvassing software so your whole organisation will stay tuned and connected throughout the process. In case your community is conservative, and the door-to-door method is not practical, you can obtain the same information as in face-to-face meetings by setting up video calls with community members interested in the matter.

2. Identify and categorize needs.

·After interacting with the community members, you'll most probable have a wide scope of attitudes and reactions to work with. In order to make sense out of the different reactions, take time to pinpoint and classify the shared information. While analysing the needs of the community, their concerns and issues can be generally sorted into four categories:

- Recognized needs. A recognized need is what a person thinks their need is. Usually, the types of needs are examined to be concerns and opinions, but it's important to observe them. For instance, a person might think their primary need to be safety in their community, but they still have to figure out the causes of these concerns about safety and the way they can be overcome. Is their community in need of increased school funding? More centre services for homeless people? More security cameras installed in the town?

- Expressed needs. If a community member has communicated some kind of need prior to your analysis it counts as an expressed need. For instance, if someone writes a complaint to the city government about poor street conditions, there will be recorded evidence of that need that later on can be helpful for the campaign.

- Absolute needs encapsulate the crucial, basic things necessary for survival, such as: clean water, food, shelter. Because of their utter significance if your community is dealing with lack or breach of their rights to absolute needs it most probably should be your campaign's top priority.

- Relative needs. These are the type of needs that are not primarily expressed for survival but are still considered necessary and essential. For example, your community may be able to function without fitness studio, but a lack of one can cause notable issues for individuals who rely on its resources for health purposes. While going through these steps you will most probably notice that there are some topics your organisation will prefer to act on compared to others.

3. Assess your organization's capacity to address needs.

The community may have numerous needs, but you and your organisation have limited resources. You will have to choose which need to focus on. In addition, your organisation may not be prepared to resolve all needs through a campaign at the moment.

Study and analyse the organisation's links and resources and what addressing each need requires. In general, many issues can be solved by one of three solutions:

- Policy change: This kind of change is achieved through laws that direct the behaviour and doings of individuals. When requesting a policy change, your organisation must possess the power to influence lawmakers to implement or change a law in relation to your addressed issue.

- Attitude change. This kind of change refers to the recombination of your community that structurally changes the current status quo. This means that this change influences the community's perspective or mindset and ''recombines'' or activates part of the community to seek changing the circumstances in their communities. For instance, the status quo today is to not throw cigarette butts in public areas while years ago this was counterfactual. Very often attitude changes can be made prior to a policy change.

- Systems change. These changes are usually the most complicated because they include change of all primary factors in the community: physical, social and economic. Physical change refers to building or crashing/removing a physical structure, economic changes refer to making financial incentives to act specific way and social changes refer to the ongoing patterns of behaviour.

Deciding which of these options is the most probable solution for your community campaign to accomplish will be subjected to the issue, to your organisation's approach and your resources. For example, raising awareness to create an attitude change will probably be more reasonable for an organisation with links to local media and a firm outreach strategy, while they may lack knowledge on legal political matters about how to seek a policy change.

4. Set objectives.

You may face difficulties trying to estimate whether an event or activity was successfully implemented while you are the one leading it and presenting the issue to local government members.

This is why you should always set objectives you strive to reach in each of your activities. This may vary from how many attendants you want to take action, how many of them should make donations for your cause after the activity, how many people you expect to attend whether you aim to come across the interest of a potential donor or someone from the local officials should reach out to your organization after the event.

5. Identify key stakeholders.

Working, advocating, and acting on behalf of a whole community can't be done by oneself. In order to gather information about the detected issue, find resources and inspire change you have to find suitable stakeholders and make a plan about your work and needs. Your pivotal partners/stakeholders are contacted and contracted based on the needs and characteristics of your campaign, but mostly you will have to communicate with these groups:

- Affected individuals: Who are the people most impacted by your campaign's key issue? Make sure to target these individuals, to partner with them in order to educate yourself more profoundly on the issue so later on you can accurately act upon and represent their needs and concerns and also to validate while explaining to other stakeholders who this campaign will affect.

- Community leaders: This group refers to everyone who has considerable impact and influence over others who are suitable and relevant to your campaign. For instance, the headmaster of your local school, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, organisers for other advocacy groups...

- Government authorities and local politicians: For many advocacy campaigns the formula for success comes down to gaining support from convincing local officials, especially if the aim is a policy change.

Prior to the interaction and communication with any of the listed stakeholders, make sure that you are able to tell the fundamental principle and elements of your campaign, consisting of:

-the targeted issue;
-why it is important;
-your potential solution;
-and why that solution is the right one.

Giving clear answers to their questions will make your campaign seem more professional and convey your message as more convincing and persuasive.

6. Create your outreach materials.

Some of the best ways to get the whole community involved, gain support and ensure effectiveness is to spread the word and reach out to possible supporters by e-mailing them, inviting them to an event or simply catching their eye by frequently posting on social media.

- Creating a message: Whether you target a small group of people, or your issue is something that concerns the whole community, your message should be compelling and persuasive enough to recruit as many people interested in your aim as possible. This can be done by making the message concise, clear, and relevant.

- Provide lots of educational resources: It may happen that some people in your community are affected by the issue you are campaigning on, but they are not aware of the details about it. Make sure that your organisation provides accessible educational materials that contain information about your campaign, the issue, the desired impact, description of your cause and your call to action.

- Introduce prompt next steps: Following the first interaction with your community members, what steps do you want them to take? Every time you create a message aimed to stimulate support, present a strategy for the next steps and actions that you expect at the end. Some of them may be: to subscribe and follow your organisation's social media platforms, to get in contact with a government official or to simply like or share a post on social media in favour of the campaign/advocacy.

You need to be cautious about which channels you share your message on. For closer interaction and profound discussion on the issue with the community members you might partner with local organisations or even host in-person events, but if you aim for support outside the community, you may stick to digital marketing and communication.

7. Begin community mobilization efforts.

As soon as you have defined your issue, you have caught your community's attention and interest on the matters and you started getting support, you may feel free to start with the main activities to launch your campaign.

Regardless of if you are aiming towards a sequence of informational meetings, a protest or a march, you must be assured that your supporters are always up to date. You can rely on the community mobilization only if they are familiar with the campaign's purpose and activities.

8. Prepare briefings and meet with elected officials.

If you manage to unite your community and raise awareness about principal issues and matters, you may be able to arrange a meeting with a local legislator.

In this case you can present the principal issue your campaign advocates for and suggest direct solutions and recommendations to them through a policy brief. The policy brief can be defined as a recap or overview of the issue that aims to clarify and accentuate its importance and convince policy makers to adopt suggested policy recommendations.

The policy brief should contain an explanatory overview explaining the principal issue you strive to solve, images, graphs and statistics that provide background information on the issue, and your precise recommendations for the resolution of the concerned issue.

- Establishing a sense of urgency: Local officials have to deal with a lot of different issues. To ease their understanding of your topic, your policy brief should contain a highlighted explanation about the importance of the problem and why it needs to be resolved immediately. Habitually this is done by accentuating potential risks in case the issue is not addressed or potential advantages if your recommendations are immediately implemented.

- Using terminology that is comprehensible to the officials and policymakers: If your issue is of scientific, complex, or technical nature, make sure that the content of the policy brief contains simple terms and comprehensible definitions for any distinct phrases or words that are substantial for the brief. For instance, if your issue is water pollution in the community, discussing exhaustively about water pollutants will leave a less convincing impression to the community than focusing on the consequences of those pollutants and highlighting the importance of your proposed solutions for the community.

- Provide pragmatic and realistic suggestions: The most paradigmatic solution for a problem usually needs more resources than the local government has at disposal for any issue. Prior to committing your policy brief to paper, conduct thorough research about the available resources and budget your local government manages. Afterwards you can provide assurance that your recommendations are practical and feasible for the local government to implement.

Looking at former successful examples of policy briefs will immensely help you when starting to work on your first brief. Following past examples of successfully implemented briefings will help you to decide on the best format for yours, while revealing what kind of strategies, arguments and methods are likely to be the most convincing.

Advocacy campaigns can't be predicted in detail, but they require a lot of research, engagement with the community and supporters to make the change you strive for. One person cannot make that change alone, but with the community behind you and their support you can make a meaningful difference. Realistically reflecting the issues and needs of the community will be the key component of running a successful campaign, the same as sowing relations with the local officials and explaining your cause clearly to the local government.

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