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**ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATIVE TIPS.**  
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**Advocacy**

Advocacy is used to promote an issue in order to influence policy-makers and encourage social change. Advocacy plays a role in educating the public, swaying public opinion or influencing policy makers. Advocacy protects and empowers people with disabilities.

1. An advocate is a person who takes a stand on a position or issue, and then, takes action!
2. Advocacy is used to promote an issue in order to influence policy-makers and encourage social change.
3. Advocacy plays a role in educating the public, swaying public opinion or influencing policy makers.
4. Advocacy protects and empowers people, including people with disabilities. Anyone can be an Advocate. They just need to be determined to bring about positive systemic change.
5. Advocacy works to change public policy (a movement) such advocacy or movement, begins with passion, anger, energy and frustration.
6. Advocacy are people who make demands on policymakers, e.g., demands to expand civil rights protections, enhance employment incentives or expand community-based services, consumer-directed personal assistance services but a movement alone is not enough to effect positive change. To bring about positive change in public policy, there must be an organized coalition rather than a haphazard response to issues or events.
7. An advocate is a person who is willing to take a risk for something they believe in, even when they are the only person who believes.in that position or issue.
8. An advocate will take some kind of action to influence others to understand and support their opinion, position, issue, and/or belief.
9. An advocate will either take action on a position or issue of their own or support or help others with their position or issue, as long as it is something they believe and/or support.

As ADAPT got further and further into the work to end the institutional bias in long term care and expand community based services they found they were combining strategies more and more often. Bob Kafka dubbed this the pitchfork approach and developed a framework for thinking about and planning this line of attack. ADAPT's multi-pronged strategy uses this approach often.

There are five prongs to this advocacy pitchfork:

1. Political,
2. System/administrative,
3. Direct action,
4. Media/education and
5. Legal.

The **political** prong addresses the political system, a state legislature, the U.S. Congress, county commissioners or a city council, in other words elected officials who pass or block passage of laws. During the political process there are opportunities to meet with the politicians to talk about your issue. These folks are elected and the whole election process gives opportunities to educate those involved. Candidates forums, surveys and the like can tell us what the candidates think about our issues, but these are also opportunities to tell them what issues are important to our communities.

The **system/administrative** prong addresses bureaucracies, state agencies, city departments and other rule making bodies. Believe it or not, once a law is passed it gets "clarified" by bureaucrats who write rules (also called Regulations, or Regs. for short) with a lot more details about what the law means. During this process, we can testify, write comments and in various ways let them know our position. These folks also interpret rules and oversee the programs. If things aren't happening the way they are supposed to, we can let the decision makers know and force them to deal with the short comings in the system.

**Direct action** involves using people power to do "street" theater, demonstrations, civil disobedience, anything that directly involves using the people involved in your group. Many people think that all forms of direct action are illegal, from holding a sign or having a rally to chaining yourself to a door or blocking a bus. In reality, most kinds of direct action are completely legal; you must break a law for something to be illegal. Sometimes breaking a law to demonstrate an immoral situation (civil disobedience) is a step you want to take, ADAPT members have done this many times and it can be very effective. However, there are many other types of direct action to choose from if your group is not ready for civil disobedience. Direct action can be the most fun prong on the pitchfork and often gets the quickest results.

**Media/education** involves getting media (TV, radio, papers, blogs, etc.) or other general education tactics like flyering, websites, social media and other efforts to get the public up-to-speed on your issue.

**Legal** refers to the courts, filing suits and the like. This list is last because so often people turn to that strategy first and then stop; they don't use any of the other prongs. Yet legal efforts are often very slow. The lawyers, judges, mediators and other players in the legal system often take the decision-making and action out of the hands of those directly involved in the issue and put control in the hands of the lawyers. This can be very disempowering. Some lawyers who take our kinds of

cases are better about leaving us in control than others. None-the-less legal can sometimes lead to great results so don't forget or totally dismiss this last prong.

By using the diverse individual skills and resources of your group and or your community, a multi-prong strategy allows different talents and ideas to emerge. However, there are four other factors that can influence the outcome of public policy issues:

1. MONEY
2. VOTES
3. EXPOSURE IN THE MEDIA (i.e., positive or negative). and,
4. COALITION BUILDING

They can be utilized to adopt or amend policy, as well as block the passage of negative policies.

1. Money is the top influencer

Citizen Action of New York State published a report in 2000 that clearly indicated that special interests can fast track policy with significant political campaign contributions.

2. Voting

Beginning with the Presidential voting debacle of 2000, the importance of the vote took on another dimension of importance, especially for persons with disabilities. However, the most effective and powerful voice is one that speaks as one. Constituents must vote in a block to be as effective as possible. Voting - in its pure nature - is the most equalizing force or catalyst for change. Regardless of whom you are or your status in society, your individual vote is no more or less powerful than anyone else's. However when combined within a group/coalition the dimensions of the singular vote take on a whole new perspective that will not be denied!

### **Building Advocacy through Voting**

People with disabilities may be the largest minority voting block in America, yet many candidates forget about the importance of making their campaigns accessible to people with disabilities. Your vote can make a significant impact in an election. Some issues to consider regarding the voting process:

- Polling place accessibility
- Voter registration
- Training for election officials
- General or disability specific voting questions
- Voting rights training
- Accessible political campaigns

3. Exposure, The Media

The media can be a "double-edged sword." If the coverage supports your point of view, it can advance your issue or stop an opposing effort dead in its tracks. Even coverage contrary to your

point of view isn't fatal, it still provides an opportunity to respond and promote awareness about your perspective. The worst scenario is when a reporter puts a different "spin" on your issue to create conflict that will help sell papers, rather than do any justice to the issue in question.

### **Develop a Message**

- Keep it simple.
- Keep it local and make use of your coalition members' locations by crafting the coalition's message to fit local audiences.
- Keep it relevant. The message should reflect the concerns of the audience.
- Repeat your message over and over (and over again).

### **Building Advocacy through the Media**

"If you don't exist in the media, for all practical purposes, you don't exist."  
-Daniel Schorr, commentator, National Public Radio

Building advocacy through the media harnesses the tools of the digital age to raise the volume, change the conversation, and leave an impression.

1. Create a media list
2. News releases
3. Letters to the editor
4. Write an opinion piece to be run on a newspaper's opinion-editorial page
5. Give interviews to newspapers, television and radio
6. Create a media event
7. Make sure the information is newsworthy.
8. Ask yourself, "How are people going to relate to this and will they be able to connect?"
9. Make sure the first 10 words of your release are effective, as they are the most important.
10. Deal with the facts.
11. Provide as much Contact information as possible: Individual to Contact, address, phone, fax, email, Web site address.
12. Make it as easy as possible for media representatives to do their jobs.
13. Media advocacy should be planned in the context of a broader solution or policy goal.

#### 4. **Coalition Building**

A campaign to change public policy (a movement) begins with passion, anger, energy and frustration. There must be people who make demands on policymakers, e.g., demands to expand civil rights protections, enhance employment incentives or expand community-based services, consumer-directed personal assistance services. But a movement alone is not enough to effect change. To be effective in changing public policy, there must be an organized coalition rather than a haphazard response to issues or events.

**What do you need to do or say to get the attention of those who can make the solution happen?**

1. Sponsoring a statewide caucus
2. Developing a disability action agenda
3. Organizing participation at hearings, rallies and press conferences
4. Issuing action alerts
5. Distributing news releases
6. Providing ongoing training opportunities
7. Negotiating
8. Meeting with state and national leaders and,
9. Developing broad coalition support.

**Systems Advocacy Strategies**

There are seven basic systems advocacy strategies that can help address a defined need and move it toward a systems change result. When a need is identified, it usually requires policy development, coalition building, and negotiation to reach serious consideration. Often, a variety of factors can delay progress. This could necessitate the use of the media, public action, direct action/civil disobedience, or even legal action. Hopefully, a strategy, or combination of strategies, can make the needed difference, resulting in a greater priority and return the parties involved toward achieving a satisfactory conclusion. If not satisfactory, then continue to compromise and negotiate, which will require further policy development. The process can continue until it results in an effective systems change, stall, or eventually lose momentum and consideration.

**These basic systems advocacy strategies are as follows:**

1. Policy Development: People versed in various laws - who are themselves directly experiencing a systemic barrier, and/or possess the technical writing skills to develop the solution to address the defined need. The policy could be a new law, amend an existing law, or take the form of an executive order. Sometimes, the law reflects a court decision or consent decree. Policy changes could also seek to impact the administrative practices or "everyday work" of a public or private entity – modifying policies and practices.
2. Coalition Building: It is a natural process to coalesce around issues. Common interests allow groups to back priority agenda items. Creative partnerships can also draw significant attention.
3. Negotiation: Once policy has been developed and coalition support obtained, someone or a small group knowledgeable on the issues and skilled in negotiation needs to meet with key staff of state leaders to advance the issues. This process can stop and start on a regular basis. There always needs to be an honest evaluation of how much compromise is too much and whether or not the meetings are productive. Is the staff of state leaders really making a good faith effort to reach a successful result? The answers to these questions will constantly direct continued negotiation or the need to heighten awareness about the issue through the use of the media, public and/or legal action.
4. Media: A coordinated media strategy helps raise awareness about an issue. Public opinion can influence the attention that an issue receives. If effective, it can prioritize the need to make a systemic change. Why? Elected officials are made accountable through the media and the vote. It is important to develop a consistent message that will help to advance

the issue past a current barrier. This can be done through a press release, which is distributed to various media markets. At times, it may be necessary to coordinate a media strategy with a public action to make an issue newsworthy among other competing interests. Also, it is important to link media advocacy to grassroots organizing work. In order to cover an accurate and compelling story, reporters require interviews with real people who are feeling the impact of the issues or policies in question. The real-world impact of the policies that need to change can and should drive media advocacy, policy work, and grassroots organizing.

5. **Public Action:** When progress stalls, public attention is needed to reprioritize the issue. A variety of public events can be utilized toward this end. They may include a press conference, a formal call-in day, letter writing campaign, petitions, visits to elected officials, rallies, etc. It is important to ensure that any activity have a consistent theme and message. The only variation might be to allow people to convey their personal experience with an issue or how it plays out in their community.

6. **Direct Action/Civil Disobedience:** Direct action techniques are another distinct method of moving policy advocacy and negotiations forward. Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote:

*"Direct action techniques can work together with other types of systems advocacy to heighten public awareness and pressure, start or unblock negotiations, and bring explicit moral claims to bear on an issue."*

7. **Legal Action:** When all else fails, the only avenue left to consider is legal action. It just has to be used. Options include filing formal legal complaints, a lawsuit, a class action lawsuit, etc. Investigation of a formal complaint may provide an opportunity to negotiate or resolve an issue, depending on the interests of the parties involved. Realize that a lawsuit could take several years and allow the other parties to avoid discussion of the issue because they are involved in litigation. Discussion may occur if both sides wish to settle. The importance of the issue, ability to obtain competent council, and unpredictability of the court system all weigh in to the final decision of whether it is prudent to take legal action to require action or compliance with an issue.

#### **For further reading on advocacy:**

[http://freeourpeople.net/disabilityorganizing101andbeyond/?page\\_id=54](http://freeourpeople.net/disabilityorganizing101andbeyond/?page_id=54)

*Organizing for Social Change: A manual for activists in the 1990's*, (second edition) by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max. Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 1996.

*The People Rising: The campaign against the Bork nomination*, by Michael Pertschuk and Wendy Schaezel. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1989.

*The Initiative Cookbook: Recipes and stories from California's ballot wars*, by Jim Schultz. San Francisco: The Democracy Center/Advocacy Institute West, 1996.

*The Activists Handbook*, by Robert Shaw. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

*Roots to Power: A manual for grassroots organizing*, by Lee Staples. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1984.

#### **on media advocacy:**

*The Fight for Public Health: Principles and practice of media advocacy*, by Simon Chapman and Deborah Lupton. London: BMJ Publishing Group, 1994.

*Media Advocacy: Reframing public debate*, by Michael Pertschuk and Phillip Wilbur, with "A Case for Paid Media," by Anne Marie O'Keefe. Benton Foundation Strategic Communications for Nonprofits, edited by Larry Kirkman and Karen Menichelli, Washington DC, 1991.

*Prime Time Activism: Media strategies for grassroots organizing*, by Charlotte Ryan. Boston: South End Press, 1991.

*Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for prevention*, by Lawrence Wallack, Lori Dorfman, David Jernigan, and Makani Themba. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993.

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- 9 Schorr, L. *Within Our Reach*. New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1988.