

## **Systems Advocacy**

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### **Top Ten Tips for Disability Policy Change Agents on How to Influence Policymakers and the Policymaking Process**

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#### **1. Understand Historical and Policy Context**

- Research treatment of persons with disabilities (such as exclusion, segregation, and automatic referral by generic system to disability system).
- Become knowledgeable about current policy framework and its strengths and inadequacies.
- Use understanding of historical and policy context to explain why change is necessary and the nature and scope of needed changes to current policy.
- Recognize intensity of feelings by persons with disabilities regarding why critical to develop new or modify existing policy based on historical treatment.

#### **2. Articulate Values, Principles, and Goals of Disability Policy**

- Recognize the difference between the old v. new paradigm of disability policy (old paradigm--need to "fix" "defective" disabled person v. new paradigm-recognize that disability is a natural part of the human experience and the responsibility of society to fix the natural, build, social and political environment by providing necessary supports, services, and accommodations (civil rights model).
- Recognize the goals of disability policy-equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.
- Equality of opportunity (individualization, inclusion, meaningful opportunity).
- Full participation (empowerment, self-determination, informed choice at individual and systems level).
- Independent living (skills, services, and supports).
- Economic self-sufficiency (training, education, assistance and supports).

### **3. Understand That Policy is Made In a Political Context**

- Public policy is proposed, debated, modified and adopted in a political environment. "Tools of the trade" include use of:
  - Politics
  - Power
  - Self Interest
  - Compromise of Positions, Not Principles

### **4. Understand the Needs of Policymakers**

- Self-Interest (re-election, power, status among peers and interest groups).
- Balancing priorities (Time pressures).
- Political Implications.
- Dependent on others for advice.

### **5. Understand the Needs of Staff**

- Promote and protect boss.
- Help in sorting through avalanche of inputs to determine what is real and what is posturing.
- Help develop assumptions and present fiscal and program estimates.
- Help in identifying key players.
- Help in developing viable policy options, drafting bills, report language, floor statements, speeches.
- Help in developing political strategy.

### **6. Understand the Need for and Role of An Organized Coalition in Exercising Power Over the Policymaking Process**

- Need for a coalition (policymakers demand it, source of power, and helps provide support/assistance to policymakers and their staff).
- Composition of the coalition (cross-disability consumers and providers and nontraditional groups).
- Cohesion (keep the disability community together).
- Synergy.
- Skilled individuals performing varied tasks working together.
- Leadership (policy entrepreneur).
- Responsibility (carrying out agreed on tasks).

## **7. Understand the Need for A Strategic Plan**

- Planned spontaneity (need to think strategically and act on basis of a plan; importance of pre-meetings).
- Reality Check (macro issues, past advocacy efforts and why change now possible, *constraints on achieving success, capacities of coalition, and degree of opposition*).
- Identify the prize (focus on principles and major concerns, not positions).
- Decide on overall strategy:
- Determine the nature and degree of controversy/opposition.
- Decide on appropriate vehicle such as modifying a statute, regulation, or guideline.
- Identify the key policymakers who will assume leadership roles. Frame the issue and decide on the message.
- Control the dynamics of the debate to create an aura of inevitability.
- Determine how a particular tactic (such as direct action or a meeting with a policymaker) fits in.
  - Develop favorable program and fiscal estimates.
  - Present viable policy options based on research and program and fiscal estimates.
- Assess effectiveness of strategies.

## **8. Understand the Power of Personal Stories Tied to Policy Objectives**

- Telling personal stories in isolation doesn't work.
- Need to decide policy objective and how to frame the issue and then tie personal story to policy objectives and policy options.
- Best personal stories demonstrate positive impact of proposed intervention/change in policy (describe circumstances before and after intervention).

## **9. Understand the Importance of Long-Term Relationships and That Who Delivers the Message Is Often More Important Than the Message**

- Develop long-term trust relationships to maximize influence.
- Strategically select the spokespersons who will have maximum influence over policymakers.
- Ensure that message is presented in manner that recognizes the needs of particular policymakers/staff.

## **10. Recognize Your Strengths and Limitations**

- Keep your eye on the prize--put ego aside.
- Don't agree to a policy option when not fully knowledgeable.
- Don't agree to a policy option on behalf of others who you don't represent.