

Civic Engagement & Advocacy Blog

How to Create a Successful Grassroots Advocacy Campaign

Posted by [Brent Willis](#) on Wed, Dec 05, 2012 @ 08:04 AM

Grassroots Advocacy is one of the most effective ways of spreading the word about a subject, but if it's done incorrectly, it can quickly become a liability.

Here's some advice on creating an effective grassroots advocacy campaign.

Determine your Theory of Change

One of the main goals of most grassroots advocacy campaigns is to increase its membership and have more people talking about it, but let's face it, "more people doing stuff" isn't exactly a strategy that will

inspire people. For this reason, you should set out your plan for how your organization will grow over time. This theory should have several parts to it, with the first part being your main plan for if everything goes as you expect it to. If you plan to set up virtual call centers, door-to-door teams, or things like that, the breakdown of these teams should be established here. However, things don't always go as planned, which is why you should also have alternate ideas just in case, such as what to do if you have way more people willing to work the phones than go door-to-door.



Don't be afraid to adjust your theory of change based on what's happening.

The important thing is having a plan you can use to explain where you are and where you're going.

Figure Out Your Overall Goal

This is the end-point of your blueprint for success, and should be the goal that your actions bring you closer to. Don't try for an unrealistic goal; instead, look for a goal that's reasonably obtainable based on your resources and is specific enough to give people a real idea of what you want. For example, "Convince the Governor to implement this proven School Safety Strategy" is a narrower, more focused, and better goal than "Convince the Governor to Improve School Safety".

Decide on your Strategies

All of your strategies should be realistic, with a focus on what you can do with what you have (and what else you can do if you have more to work with). More importantly, though, you need strategies in the first place. How do the people in your area communicate? Have other campaigns similar to yours successfully employed certain strategies in the past? What's the most cost-effective way to get support from backers? Before you make a

single phone call or knock on any door, you have to know how you're going to accomplish your goals (and what you're going to do if things don't go as planned).

Power your Campaign

Your people are your greatest resource, so get the most out of them. More importantly, note which of your members is the most successful for your grassroots advocacy campaign and who has the greatest ability to multiply the effects of their involvement. If you can, try to get the support of local organizations that people in your area trust; a public statement of approval from a Police Chief, School Superintendent, Business Owner, or somebody else that the public knows can have a strong positive influence. However, you should also be aware of the possibility for backlash.

Even if you appreciate someone's support, they may not be the type of person you'd like to associate with.

For example, a Police Chief who's currently or has recently been under investigation for charges of corruption probably isn't somebody you'd want to have speak for you. Your ultimate goal should be to energize your campaign and encourage others to join you, and remember that this means putting effective workers at every level, not just the top or the bottom.

Engage your Members

When you have people where you want them to be (i.e. where they'll do the most good for your grassroots advocacy campaign), you'll need to be able to communicate effectively with them. The proper way to do this will depend on the size of your campaign, and you might ultimately end up needing to change your communication method (household meetings, e-mail, cell phone, Votility, etc.) several times as your campaign grows, possibly with several methods at once. You may even need to split your campaign into two or more largely independent groups that look to you for overall direction. Either way, effectively engaging your members can help keep morale high and improve results. Try to minimize the levels of management though; too much bureaucracy can bog you down. However, if you know how and when to communicate, you can help make sure that your campaign is functioning as effectively as possible at every level, and that translates directly to better results.