

Planning an Advocacy Campaign

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is an individual or group effort to influence a law, a policy or some other decision. Advocacy can be directed at government bodies or officials at various levels, or at other institutions or individuals.

For example, you could use advocacy to convince **Parliament** to pass a law on children's rights, to persuade your **regional council** to provide better services for the elderly or to pressure your **local authority** to take steps against illegal shebeens. You could use advocacy to encourage your local **clinic** to stay open in the evenings, or to encourage your **school** to introduce a new sport, or to get your **church** to play a more active role in speaking out on poaching, or to get your **employer** to offer a better medical aid plan, or to get your **traditional leader** to involve more women in decision-making roles.

If I try to influence the decision of the council, won't people say that I am getting involved in things that are none of my business?



If a decision affects you, it is your right to express your opinion. Hearing different views from the community helps people in power to make better decisions.

Why is advocacy important?

In a democracy, political power rests with the country's citizens. The word "democracy" comes from a Greek word that means "rule by the people". In a representative democracy such as Namibia, decisions are made by the people's elected representatives – but these representatives cannot make decisions in the public interest without information about what the public wants. In a strong democracy, the government allows space for many different voices in decision-making processes, and many people participate by making their opinions known because they want to make their country the very best country possible.

Ten steps in planning an advocacy campaign

STEP 1 ► Identify the issue. Focus on a manageable issue. For example, perhaps you want government to reduce poverty or create jobs. These are valid issues, but your campaign might be more successful if you focus on more specific issues – such as increasing government grants for children, or providing start-up grants for small businesses in your community.

STEP 2 ► Identify other groups and individuals affected by the issue. Think about who will benefit from the change you propose, and who might oppose your idea. This will help you decide which other groups to involve in your campaign. Meeting with groups that might oppose the change could help you to find common ground. For example, maybe you are concerned about alcohol being sold to underage children in shebeens. Instead of engaging in a campaign against shebeens, which may be an important source of income for some people, you could meet with local shebeen owners and try to get their support for stricter enforcement of the age limits for alcohol. You could discuss ways that this might benefit the entire community.

STEP 3 ► Define your goal. Your goal is what you want to change, who will make the change, and when the change will take place. The goal should be as specific as possible. Make sure that you have a "message", which is a short and clear statement about your goal. For example, if you are interested in improving the lives of the elderly, your message may call for an increase in the old age pension from next year. If you are concerned about crime, you might ask your local authority for improved street lighting or ask police to increase their presence at night. Try to make a demand that is realistic.

STEP 4 ► Develop solutions. It is better to suggest solutions than just to complain. You could collect information on the issue, which might include facts and figures to support your argument. You should also contact people who are directly affected by the issue, as they will often have the best ideas for a solution. Do not think that you need any particular level of education to come up with a good idea – your life experience makes you qualified to have good ideas about the issues that affect you. For example, community members who were concerned about sexual abuse by teachers and parents suggested that there should be heavier punishments for people who commit rape in a relationship of trust. This idea became part of Namibia's Combating of Rape Act. ►

STEP 5 ► Build coalitions and networks. A network is a group of individuals or organisations that assist one another or work together towards the same goal. To build a network, contact other people and organisations interested in similar issues and goals and communicate with each other regularly. Everyone in a network should be open to working together, sharing information, and assisting each other. **The network can be a temporary, informal group that works together only on a single advocacy campaign, or it might develop into a more permanent group that continues to work on related issues.**

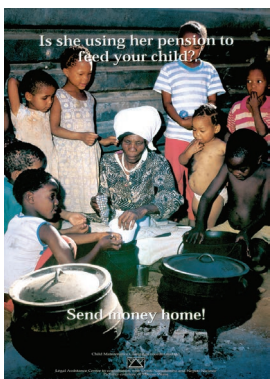
STEP 6 ► Identify decision-makers. The primary audience of your advocacy campaign should be the people who have the power to make the desired changes – such as government ministers, regional councillors or local authority councillors. The secondary audience should be other people who can also influence the decision-makers – such as church and community leaders, members of the opposition parties, or other people affected by the issue. Try to meet with the appropriate decision-makers to discuss your concerns at an early stage. Understanding the issue from their perspective may help you to refine your goals. Remember that the decision-makers you are trying to influence are not necessarily your opponents. Improving a situation may be in their interests as well. **For example, suppose your neighbourhood watch group is concerned about crime and was planning to demand that more police be assigned to the community. You go to your local police station and meet with the station commander, who informs you that a shortage of police vehicles is actually the main factor hampering police work in your area. This information helps you to revise your demand.**

STEP 7 ► Identify your advocacy strategies. You must choose a campaign strategy that fits your issue and your resources. Your plan might include public awareness campaigns, media campaigns, petitions, meetings with decision-makers, or public demonstrations. When you are considering your strategy, think about the time frame and the processes that are already underway. You will be more successful if you try to influence decisions at strategic times. **For example, it is unlikely to be effective to lobby for law reform on some issue if Parliament has just passed a new law on that topic. If decision-makers have organised opportunities for consultation (such as public hearings organised by a Parliamentary committee), you should take advantage of that process instead of coming along afterwards with your input.**

STEP 8 ► Involve the media. Involving the media is a great way to gain public support for your goal. You can reach more people through newspapers, radio, television and social media (like Twitter and Facebook) than you could ever reach on your own. **You can inform the media about your issue with a press release, or get your friends and colleagues to discuss the issue on social media.**

STEP 9 ► Build public awareness and support. It is important to gain broad public support for your issue, as this will help to build pressure on the relevant decision-makers. Keeping track of public opinion can also show how effective your advocacy has been. **For example, if you hold a community meeting to discuss the issue, take note of how many people attend. This is evidence of how much interest there is in the issue. If you organise a public protest, be sure and get photographs which show how many people came out in support of your goal. If many people are in agreement on an issue, decision-makers are more likely to listen.**

STEP 10 ► Evaluate the results and consider follow-up action. It is important to evaluate the progress you make and how you got there. Look at your successes. Consider the people you reached and the connections you made. Look at any problems you had, and consider mistakes that were made. This will help you to be more successful in the future. **For example, suppose that you organised a public demonstration but the turn-out was very poor. Was the problem that people did not know about the demonstration? Did they lack transport to get there? Was the time chosen for the demonstration difficult for people in the community? If the relevant decision-makers promise to take action on your goal, you should monitor the situation to make sure that the action is effective. Did you develop the right solution? Additional steps may be required to achieve the desired result. For example, suppose you have lobbied for a new law on domestic violence. The law is passed, but police and magistrates in your area do not implement it effectively. As a follow-up action, you might want to request that government provide additional training for the officials who must apply the law.**



Identifying the best advocacy strategy

Consider these questions:

- *What are your strengths?* Examples might be public support or good access to decision-makers.
- *What are your weaknesses?* Examples might be lack of funds or little experience of advocacy.
- *What are the opportunities?* Examples might be an election or some other relevant event coming up.
- *What are the threats?* Examples might be hostility to your campaign in the community, or the limits of the economic situation.

Basic strategies include:

- *direct communication with decision-makers* (letters or meetings)
- *indirect communication with decision-makers* (someone else who is influential contacts the decision-maker)
- *building awareness* (radio, press, TV public events, email, social media)
- *public pressure* (writing letters, public protests, petitions).

For almost all advocacy strategies, it is usually more effective to engage in discussion rather than confrontation. If your advocacy campaign is unsuccessful, do not become down-hearted. Think about what worked well and what worked badly, and why. Then adapt or change your strategy based on your experience. ■