



Advocacy Toolkit for Women in Politics

1 Planning for Advocacy

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Advocacy is the process of conveying a message more broadly to a mass audience on behalf of others. It seeks to draw attention to an important issue or problem and build support for acting on both the problem and the solution. The intended outcome of advocacy is a change of policies, positions or programmes of any type of institution.

This may be, for example, influencing public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions — that directly affect people’s current lives. It is not just about advocating on behalf of other people. Affected communities should also be capacitated to advocate on their own behalf.

Advocacy is part of communications -- how we put things in a new way to make people understand what we are talking about and, by so doing, changing value systems/worldviews.

Advocacy needs careful planning to be effective. The change you

seek will not happen automatically. It is a process that can take months and, in some cases, even years. This is why it is important to plan your advocacy and recognize that the results may require some re-strategising along the way.

Below is a step-by-step approach to developing your advocacy plan so that you are clear about your objectives, target group, actions and methods of evaluating the success of your strategy toward achieving your objectives.

Step One: Understand and define the issue

You will need to do extensive research (see Research toolsheet) on the issue or issues you plan to campaign on so that you understand the problem or issue thoroughly, are able to articulate it within various contexts, in particular the impact it has on the affected group or community and so that you can come up with a proposed solution.

An important part of your research will be to identify the affected group or groups who will benefit from the change and how. For example, the problem may be gender-based violence (GBV) at university campuses.

Your affected group would be young women attending tertiary institutions and your proposed solution may be increased budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Higher Education so they can improve security and campus lighting.

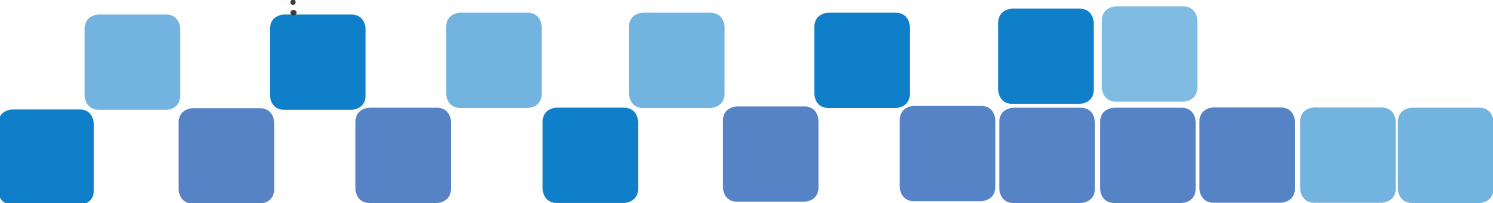
You also want to identify groups that are likely to oppose the change you are proposing so you understand why and how you can work together to sway them to supporting your proposed solution.

Step Two: Define the target group

Be clear on who your target group is. Is it the general public that you want to recognize the problem and make personal changes or push for policy changes? Is it legislators who you would like to make new laws or revise existing ones in line with your proposed solution? It may be the leadership of your party that you wish to influence to commit to equal representation within party structures, a gender policy, greater allocation of funds to women candidates or mainstreaming gender in the party manifesto. You may have more than one target group, for example the general public and legislators.

A good advocacy message is:

- ✓ Clear – speak conversationally to the point, and don’t use jargon
- ✓ Concise – should be able to be expressed in a short paragraph
- ✓ Compelling – should speak to the values and concerns of the target of the advocacy;
- ✓ Contrasting – should lay out the difference between what you are advocating for and what others are advocating for (whether it is the status quo or new legislation); and
- ✓ Credible – it must be believable and able to be accomplished.



Once you are clear on your target group you need to be aware of what their current stance on your issue is so you can develop the right approach to getting their attention and action.

Step Three: Develop a message

Once you have understood the issue or problem you plan to campaign on you need to define it through a consistent message for your target group or groups.

Your key message is the central idea around which all advocacy on a particular issue revolves. The message answers the “why” of your advocacy campaign. In order to be effective, it should be well thought out and explanatory.

It is important here to consider how you “frame” your message. That is, how your message can be put across in a way that challenges and changes the way that people see the world and what counts as common sense (see Framing Issues toolsheet). Be consistent with your message at all times so that people hear, internalize and adopt it. Once they have received it they are more likely to be interested to hear what else you have to say.

You can develop other messages, for example slogans, which elaborate or encapsulate your main message.

Step Four: Develop an action plan

Your action plan will cover the range of activities that you plan to carry out as part of your advocacy campaign. These may include media outreach, public talks, meetings with politicians, building networks and coalitions, public rallies, exhibitions, petitions and many other

creative ways of getting your message out.

Rather than undertaking isolated actions that are unlikely to have much impact, your activities should build on each other for greater effectiveness. Focusing first on raising the profile of the issue you are advocating on in the media or other platforms, for example, may convince decision makers to meet with you to discuss your recommendations.

The action plan should spell out your goals, target audience, partners you will work with and the time frame. It should be flexible to allow you to deal with a changing environment and new developments. This may require you to drop or replace actions that prove to be unnecessary or ineffective.

Your action plan should be accompanied by a detailed budget. Determine the resources required, including human resources, for you to be able to achieve your actions and where those resources will come from (see Resource Mobilisation toolsheet).

Step Five: Partnerships and Public Support

You will need support to achieve your advocacy goals. You can seek specific kinds of support from your networks (see Networking toolsheet) and general support from the public, which will help to build pressure on decision-makers to adopt your proposed recommendations. The media is one way of raising awareness and building public support (see Media toolsheet).

Step Six: Monitor and Evaluate

As you implement your advocacy, you need to continuously monitor your results in achieving the goals of your campaign. Monitor your strengths and build

on these, assess your weaknesses and come up with ways of overcoming these. Identify any opportunities, such as timing, for example an international day like International Women’s Day or the period of “16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence” that you could use to get your message more widely heard.

Alternatively, monitor the political and social climate and see how your campaign can fit in within the changing environment and the agenda that is being set. As part of this you also need to assess existing or potential threats to your campaign and work around these. Threats may come as a result of a changing social, political or economic environment or opposing views and mindsets to your proposed recommendations.

At the close of your advocacy campaign you will need to consider the success you have had, the failures and the mistakes you made and why.

You also need to follow-up on any outcomes. For example, if the decision makers in your political party have committed to putting a party gender policy in place, what steps are being taken to develop that policy and have it implemented?

Sources:

Campaigning for the MDGs: Making votes and voices count in elections – a toolkit for activists, political parties and candidates, UN Millennium Campaign, 2009,

Bangkok Advocacy in Action: A guide to influencing decision-making in Swaziland, WLSA Swaziland, 2006, Mbabane.

Developing a Grassroots Advocacy Plan in a Senior Residential Community, NYAHS, 2006, New York www.nyahsa.org