



THE ART OF

ADVOCACY STRATEGY

*A SMALL BOOK ABOUT
HOW TO MAKE BIG CHANGE*

WRITTEN BY JIM SHULTZ
THE DEMOCRACY CENTER

DEDICATED TO

— ALL OF THE BRAVE
AND COMMITTED ACTIVISTS
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WHO
IT HAS BEEN OUR HONOR TO
WORK WITH THESE PAST THIRTY
YEARS - AND TO THE DOZENS
OF POWERFUL AND INSPIRING
YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN
A PART OF THE DEMOCRACY
CENTER IN THAT JOURNEY.

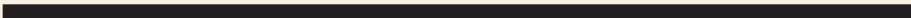


TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION - 1

WHAT IS ADVOCACY? - 3

WHAT IS STRATEGY? - 5

WHAT DO YOU WANT? - 7

WHAT'S THE MAP
OF POWER? - 11

WHAT'S YOUR
ACTION PLAN? - 19

FINDING YOUR
OWN POWER - 31

WORKSHOP
EXERCISES - 34

INTRODUCTION

**DEMOCRACY WITHOUT
ACTIVISM IS A
HOLLOW THING**



Voting is essential, but it is with our activism beyond elections that we fully claim the right of all people to change the world around us.

For three decades, the Democracy Center has worked side by side with brave and committed activists all across the world. They join with others to demand and win action from governments, corporations, and other instruments of power. We have worked with immigrant activists in California and public health activists in apartheid South Africa, with indigenous communities in Bolivia and the leadership of UNICEF worldwide, and many others.

And at the center of all of this work our mission has always been the same: To help people take that spark of activism and turn it into real change.

This booklet is a tool that draws on the wisdom we have gained from these collaborations with many people in many places. Its aim is to help people make their advocacy as strategic and effective as it can be. It offers a well-tested

and methodical approach to developing advocacy strategy. It highlights powerful examples of advocacy in action from some of the campaigns the Democracy Center has been involved in and helped lead. It also offers a set of workshop exercises that groups can use as they plan their own advocacy campaigns.

For those new to advocacy, we hope this booklet will help inspire a deeper understanding of how to make a difference. For those with many years of experience, we hope it will aid in explaining and demystifying advocacy to others. And for everyone, we hope it will help you become even more powerful in the urgent work of making a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Jim Shultz

Founder & Executive Director
The Democracy Center

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

**AD·VO·CA·CY / NOUN: THE ART OF GETTING
SOMEONE WITH POWER TO DO SOMETHING THAT THEY
WOULD NOT OTHERWISE DO.**

Most of us learned about advocacy as young children. We were surrounded by people who had different forms of power over us – our parents, older brothers and sisters, teachers, and others. We steadily learned the fine art of getting them to give us what we wanted. We figured out how to make convincing arguments about getting a puppy, how to form alliances with siblings, and the pros and cons of temper tantrums.

Advocacy in the world of youths and adults is much the same. There are things we want – more money spent on health care and public schools, more aggressive action on climate change, more justice for immigrants. And then there are the people and institutions with the power to either make that happen or stop us in our tracks.

Advocacy is an art. How we utilize advocacy effectively depends entirely on the



issue and the political environment involved. There is no single magic formula. We make arguments. We make deals. We form alliances. And sometimes we express our anger in protests. **All of this is advocacy.**

In the California Capitol, health activists advocate by lobbying lawmakers with evidence and testimony. In Bolivia, water rights activists advocate by blocking highways

and bringing the country to a standstill.

As different as they are, both are examples of advocacy in action. Both are about getting someone with power to do something they would not otherwise do. From climate change to children's rights, from health reform to criminal justice, making a difference almost always involves that same challenge: **Getting the powerful to do something you want.**

WHAT IS STRATEGY?

"STRATEGY WITHOUT TACTICS IS THE SLOWEST ROUTE TO VICTORY. TACTICS WITHOUT STRATEGY IS THE NOISE BEFORE DEFEAT." → SUN TZU, *THE ART OF WAR*

Advocacy is about getting someone to do something. **Strategy is about how you get them to do it.**

An advocacy strategy is a plan of action designed to give us our best shot at winning. It should have a clear sense of what you want to achieve and a grounded understanding of where you are starting from. It then envisions a path of action from one point to the other with a plausible chance of

success. No strategy comes with a guarantee of victory, but one based on magical thinking is almost always a bad idea.

Often, activists are confused between the ideas of strategy and tactics. Tactics are about the specific actions that we take – publishing a report, organizing a protest.

Strategy is about the bigger picture. What are we trying to achieve and how

can we do that? Too often we get lost in tactics and lose sight of the strategy (or never actually have one). That is when we run the risk that all our fervent actions will just become "the noise before defeat."

Just as there is no one kind of advocacy, there is also no set formula for what makes an effective advocacy strategy. What might work well in one place or on one issue might be completely ineffective on a different issue in a different place. However, what we have found – all over the

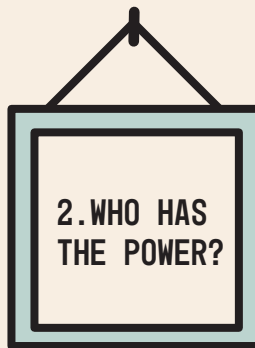
world and in wildly different political environments – is that there are three fundamental questions that every effective advocacy effort must ask and answer in a thoughtful and clear way, in order to be strategic:



What do you want? What is the map of power? What is your plan of action to win?

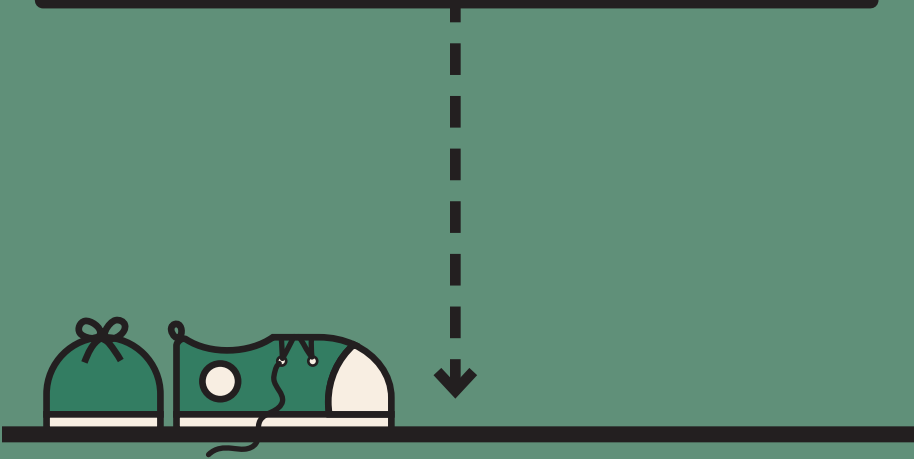
At first glance, these questions may seem deceptively simple, but each one opens up the door to a deeper analysis about the most effective way to make change happen.

THREE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS



QUESTION № 1

WHAT DO YOU WANT?



There are two ways to take a walk. One is to stroll without aim and the other is to know quite clearly where you are trying to go. Effective advocacy is not a leisurely stroll. We have to know where we are going, otherwise we get lost. Figuring out where you want to go is generally about **three things**:

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

It is important to be clear about the problem you are trying to solve, who it affects, and how it affects them.

We need to state the problem clearly for two reasons: First, talking about the problem is how you get people to care about the problem. Second, knowing the problem is how you make sure that your proposed solution will actually help solve it.

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

You may never win everything you propose, and what you do win might take far longer than you wish. But having a clear vision of the actual solution is critical. It helps keep you focused on your larger goal in the midst of all the smaller steps involved in getting there.

That also means having a clear sense of the mechanics involved in that solution. What specifically do you need? Do you need to change a law, add more money to a budget, or shut

→ IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

- ▶ In California, more than 3 million people still do not have health insurance. When they and their children get sick, they worry not only about their illness but also whether they can get the care they need.
- ▶ More than two million children in Thailand live in extreme poverty, in families unable to meet even their most basic needs. As a result, they live at constant risk of hunger, illness, and other dangers.

down a corporate polluter? This is where advocacy joins with policy analysis. Smart solutions to public problems do not pop out of thin air. They require careful research: What has been tried elsewhere and how has it worked? Which approaches win strong public support and which provoke strong opposition? What are your options and what makes the most sense in the context of your issue and the politics around it?

WHERE DO WE START?

Big solutions to any problem are rarely won overnight. Most are built methodically piece by piece. Figuring out the right first moves is one of the most important parts of advocacy strategy. It's like the first gear in a car. Getting a vehicle that is already moving 50 mph to speed up to 60mph is not a big job. Getting a two-ton parked piece of steel to

move 5 mph is the real work. An early advocacy objective, one with a timeframe of a year or so, needs to do a certain set of things to advance you strategically. It should introduce the issue in a way that builds public support toward the longer-term goal. It should build the advocacy alliances that you need to be successful over the longer-term. And this early objective should also actually do something real to make people's lives better.

In the early days of the health care movement in California, the long-term goal was a system to provide comprehensive, quality health care to everyone. Advocates there began by campaigning to expand health care to the poorest and to prohibit insurers from excluding



people with pre-existing health conditions. In Thailand, UNICEF opened its campaign for a universal child support grant by championing a smaller plan aimed at infants in poor families.

There is always a debate in advocacy strategy over whether pushing for something partial is a step forward or a step backward. There is no one right answer to this question but there are some useful ways to think about it. Does a proposed partial solution trade away the pressure building to do something big, or does it seize ground and win something real now that can be built on later?

It is also true that not everyone is positioned the same to wait for slow progress. People whose lives are at stake are going to have a greater sense of

urgency and less interest in something partial. Advocacy campaigns need to think about who has the larger right to make the judgments about how big or how modest to make our demands. Those with the deepest personal stakes have a moral right to make those choices.

***JUMP TO EXERCISE #1
ON PAGE 35***



QUESTION № 2

WHO HAS THE POWER?



The fate of an advocacy campaign is usually determined not by one person or institution but by a whole constellation of them. Effective advocacy requires us to understand the entire ecosystem of power around an issue, and our advocacy has to be aimed at multiple actors all at once. This includes those who have the official authority to take action, and a whole set of others who will wield influence over what they do. Developing a map of these key actors is an important first step.

WHO HAS THE OFFICIAL AUTHORITY?

On any given issue, there is some institution and some group of people in that institution who have the formal authority to say Yes or No to what you want. Think of them like someone who has her finger on the light switch in a room. Ultimately it's the person with their hand on that switch who will either turn it off or on. The same is true with advocacy.

Someone has the formal authority to say Yes or No to what we are asking for or demanding. **Knowing who that is, with precision, is critical.**

Everything you do in your advocacy is ultimately to get that person/institution to turn on the light switch.

If it's a local issue, who makes the decision: the mayor, the city council, the zoning board? When a state legislature or Congress is involved, that authority is usually spread across a

whole sequence of actors: There are committee votes and floor votes and ultimately a governor's or president's signature. If you are dealing with decisions made in some bureaucratic system of departments or agencies, there are also multiple actors involved and some sort of sequence of approvals to understand.

WHO ELSE HAS INFLUENCE?

In a room with a light switch, the person with her finger on it probably isn't making

the on/off decision all by herself. Others will have sway over her choice of light vs. dark. This is true with advocacy as well. While it is critical to know who has the official authority, it is also essential to understand who is shouting or whispering in their ear **and wielding influence.**

Who has that influence will vary a lot depending on the



political context. In some places business leaders call the shots and in others, labor unions have power. In some places influence plays out in public and in the media. In others it is all behind closed doors. Usually it is some mix of all this.



MAP THE POWER

After you have a sense of who all those various people and institutions are, then you can begin mapping them based on the answers to two other big questions: **How much power do they have over the issue, and where do they stand?** In the Democracy Center's advocacy workshops we do this in a visual way (see Workshop Exercise box), creating a 'power grid' that looks something like this one on the next page.

This gives groups a way to see, in illustrated form, where things stand. An effective advocacy strategy begins with understanding the map

of power as it is, and then we can develop a strategy for how to change it.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

PICK YOUR KEY TARGETS

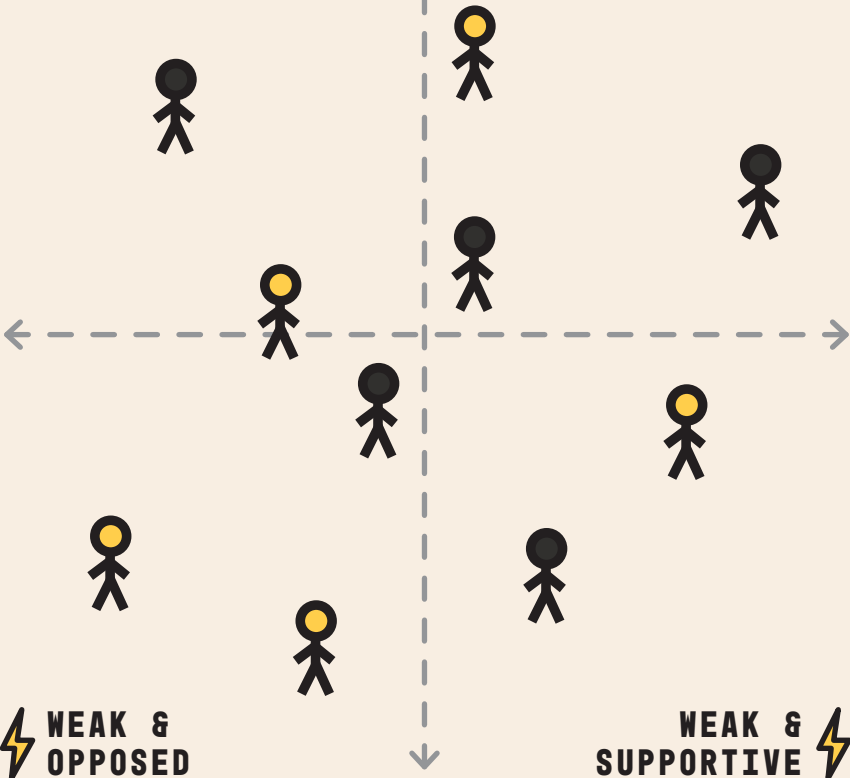
If there are powerful actors on your map (either with formal authority or heavy influence) and they are opposed to what you want, ignoring them is not an option. If the chair of an important legislative committee or local city council member stands in your way, you need to deal with that. Generally you have two basic options – **either win them over or make them less powerful.**

If you think you can move them to your side, try that. In some cases they might be moved by evidence and argument. In other cases, they are steadfast and persuasion is not an option. Strategies aimed at entrenched adversaries can include trying to weaken

MAP OF POWER

 **POWERFUL & OPPOSED**

POWERFUL & SUPPORTIVE 



OFFICIAL AUTHORITY



STRONG INFLUENCE

their power (by publicly exposing their connections to an offending industry, for example) or by trying to remove them from power altogether during the next election.

MOBILIZE YOUR CHAMPIONS

Every advocacy campaign needs a champion, and usually more than one. This is someone who has power and is strongly on your side. Whether that power comes from official authority or outside influence, strong advocacy campaigns need to deploy their champions with maximum effect. This might mean equipping supportive lawmakers with the kind of stories and evidence that will make their messaging more powerful. It might mean helping a key ally get a bigger public spotlight to deliver the message.

BUILD THE POWER OF YOUR SUPPORTERS

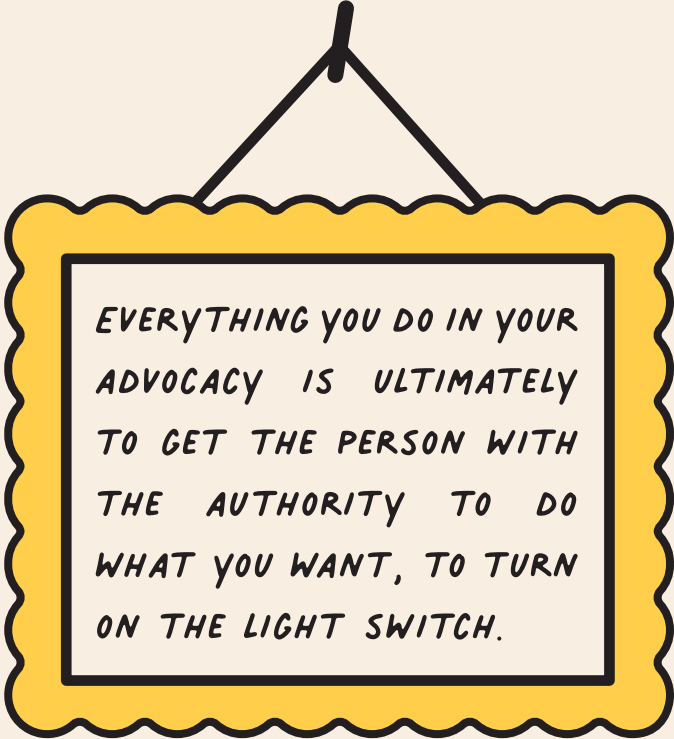
There may be all kinds

of people and groups who are strongly on your side but who are not especially powerful. This often includes traditionally marginalized people and communities (people of color, youth, LGBTQ, etc.) who are actually the most impacted. It is important to support them to become more influential. At the Democracy Center we've helped formerly homeless women lobby lawmakers on poverty issues. We've helped immigrant day laborers make their case for immigrant rights to editorial writers.

There are ways to help the disempowered become the actual agents of change. This is also a key part of effective advocacy strategy.

***JUMP TO EXERCISE #2
ON PAGE 36***





EVERYTHING YOU DO IN YOUR
ADVOCACY IS ULTIMATELY
TO GET THE PERSON WITH
THE AUTHORITY TO DO
WHAT YOU WANT, TO TURN
ON THE LIGHT SWITCH.






BECHTEL VS. BOLIVIA

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR TARGET

In the year 2000, the people of Cochabamba, Bolivia, blockaded the country's major highways and shut down their city with general strikes to demand the return of their public water system, which had been leased off to a giant U.S. corporation, Bechtel Enterprises. In what became known as the Cochabamba Water Revolt, the company was eventually kicked out, but only after government repression left one teenage boy dead and

more than a hundred other people wounded.

Eighteen months later, Bechtel struck back with a \$50 million legal case against the people of Bolivia in a World Bank trade court. The Democracy Center and an alliance of groups in Bolivia and worldwide launched the first ever people's campaign against such a case. But the chosen field of battle was not the tribunal and the high-

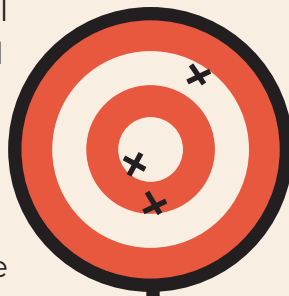


priced lawyers arguing the case. The campaign instead mounted its effort in the court of public opinion, and targeted just one man—Riley Bechtel, the corporation’s chief executive officer and grandson of its founder. The strategy was not to try to win the case in a rigged court, but to force Bechtel to drop the case by hammering on its CEO.

The campaign obtained his personal email address and shared it with 2,000 people who wrote to him demanding that he leave Bolivia alone. The campaign pinned him in global news stories to the David and Goliath battle of people taking back their water. Supporters protested at the corporation’s San Francisco headquarters. The campaign spurred a City of San Francisco resolution

calling on Bechtel to drop the case, just as it was negotiating with the city for a giant infrastructure contract. And all the while the campaign made sure that Mr. Bechtel’s well-paid public relations department saw everything.

In January 2006, Bechtel agreed to drop its case against Bolivia for a token payment equal to 35 cents. Never before had a company dropped a giant trade case in response to public pressure. When the lawyer representing the Bolivian government was asked why Bechtel had finally caved in, he explained: “Their lawyers said that the CEO intervened and told them the case was doing too much damage and to make it go away.” ◀



QUESTION № 3

WHAT'S YOUR ACTION PLAN?



All of this analysis, about your goals, about the key actors, and more, is all about being able to plan the actions that you think give you the best chance of winning what you seek. Those actions revolve around three central tasks: Developing Your Advocacy Message, Planning Your Advocacy Activities, and Evaluating and Changing Your Strategy Along the Way.

WHAT'S YOUR MESSAGE?

An advocacy campaign's message is central to its strategy. The message is the story the campaign tells that is understandable and powerful at the same time. Usually it is about the problem that you want people to care about and the solution you want people to support.

These real world examples here are the simple versions of the messages used by

those movements, the ones that capture the essence of what you have to say. But then those top-line messages need to have depth added to them. How much depth depends on who you are speaking with. In our strategy planning workshops, we work with a tool called '**The Message Pyramid**,' giving people a structured way to think about their messages.

At the top is the **most simple version of the message**, akin to the two

→ CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

REAL WORLD EXAMPLES

- ▶ Health insurance companies are making health care unaffordable for consumers by bloating the system with huge administrative costs and the demand for large profits. What is needed is a public option, like Medicare, available to everyone.
- ▶ Global climate change is sentencing our children to live on a planet more dangerous and threatening than anything humanity has seen before. We have to act now to end the use of fossil fuels, protect the planet's forests, and develop our resilience to the changes already underway.

THE MESSAGE PYRAMID



*1. STATE THE BASICS
FOR THE GENERAL
PUBLIC*

*2. ADD SOME DETAIL TO
SUPPORT YOUR POINT*

*3. PROVIDE THE
TECHNICAL SPECS FOR
THE POLICY EXPERTS*

examples above. This is the short narrative that you might use with the general public. For some, it might be all they really need to hear. For others it will serve as an introduction, a doorway into the more complex levels of messaging that follow.

The next layer **adds more detail** to buttress your core points. Below that is the **most technical level** of your message, the information

primarily of interest to people immersed in the details, like policy makers, experts, and journalists who cover the issue in depth.

Effective advocates not only need these different levels to their messages, they also need to know **how deep to go with each audience**. Dumping too much information on some people will just lose them. Speaking too simply with



*AN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY
MESSAGE ISN'T NECESSARILY
WHAT SOUNDS CONVINCING TO
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YOU MOST NEED TO PERSUADE.*

others can make you seem uninformed or insufficiently serious. The key is to be able to speak in both languages – simple and complex – and know which version fits the situation you are in.

**JUMP TO EXERCISE #3
ON PAGE 37**





"I THOUGHT I WAS COVERED"

CRAFTING A MESSAGE THAT BREAKS THROUGH

In the early 1990s, the leaders of California's fledgling health care advocacy movement had a problem. They had first come together to champion health care for the poor, and then expanded their efforts to work toward getting coverage for the millions of working people who still didn't have it.

The problem was that any serious reform effort also had to appeal to the millions

of Californians who had health insurance through their employers, and who were deeply suspicious of changes that might mess with what they had. But all that middle-class support for the current system was based on a dangerous and often false assumption: that if they ever actually got sick they would have the coverage they needed.

The reality, however, was very different, something

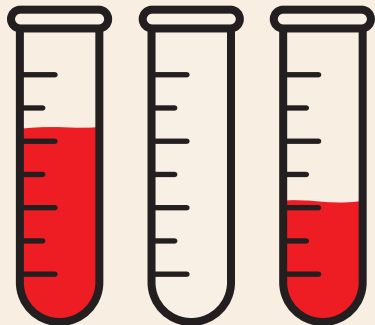
consumers found out only when it was too late. One powerful group of people that came forward called themselves Parents of Kids With Cancer: mothers and fathers who, in the worst moments of their lives, were getting told coldly by their insurers that the expensive help their children needed was excluded by all manner of bureaucratic trickery and exclusions.

Through weeks of careful discussion and debate, health reformers settled on a message aimed right at the heart of middle-class complacency with the current system. Rose Hughes, a mom whose son was battling childhood cancer, looked directly into the news cameras and declared, “Like most people, I thought I was covered.”

If you look at the trajectory

of the movement for health care in the U.S. since the 90's and onward to today, you see the echo of that same message, one developed in California more than thirty years before: “I thought I was covered.” It has fueled the push to eliminate exclusions for pre-existing health conditions, lifetime caps on coverage, and much more.

A truly effective advocacy message is not complicated. It is simple and hits at the heart of the issue in ways that people can see for themselves. But getting to that simple message usually involves a good deal of work. ◀



TAKING ACTION: LOOK STRATEGICALLY AT YOUR OPTIONS

When you go into a restaurant the first thing you usually do is look at the menu. You see what your options are and decide what suits you best. Are you a meat eater or a vegetarian? What can you afford to spend? Is there something on special that you like? The same is smart practice when you decide on your advocacy actions. First, take a studied look at your options. In general, the menu for actions falls into two broad categories.



INSIDE ACTIONS

This is the gentle side of advocacy, done in circumstances where information and argument actually make a real difference. Inside actions are about having meetings with people in authority, providing information, and making a case for action. In some circumstances it's enough and you don't have to go further. Even if we do need to go further, these kinds of actions often still play an important role in our advocacy.

But in many situations the people who have the power aren't especially interested in the merits of an issue. They are focused on the politics of it – what it means to their public image or their relationships with powerful interest groups. Where that is the case, more aggressive kinds of actions are needed.

OUTSIDE ACTIONS

This is where advocacy moves into applying pressure. On the mild side, this might involve organizing a coalition of groups to join the call for action. It might mean mobilizing the people directly affected – young immigrants threatened with deportation, or health workers on the front line of a health crisis. It means getting stories in the media and using social media to target pressure on those reluctant to act. It can also mean using litigation and legal action to force the hand of those you are targeting.

Then there is the place where advocacy crosses into protest to bring more pressure still. In 2020, activists poured into the streets across the U.S. to protest the killing of innocent black people by police. Marches have been held around the world to

demand that global leaders take action on the global climate crisis. Beyond that, protest can go further into civil disobedience – directly shutting things down to apply intense pressure on those with the power to act. In Bolivia during the Cochabamba Water Revolt, people shut down a city of more than half a million people with huge general strikes to win back control of their public water system.

HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT MIX

How you use these different approaches depends entirely on the political context. Here again, there is no one right answer, but there are some important questions to consider:

- What will have an impact? In the end, the purpose of any advocacy action is to win results. What action will put the issue on the political map

and force attention to it? What will make those with power decide it is better to be with you than against you? What is most likely to win real action?

- Are there any specific opportunities available? Sometimes an event or sudden change creates a special opportunity to have an impact. Election time, when politicians are on the ballot, is one special opportunity to make them answerable on an issue. An event in the news might suddenly put a harsh spotlight on an issue and create a new opening for change, as George Floyd's murder did in 2020 on the issue of police violence aimed at Black Americans.

- What will build your power? Sometimes we pick a course of action because it builds our overall power to press our demands. Climate

marchers filled the streets of New York and beyond during a UN climate summit to make it clear that large numbers of people demanded action. Whether it is forming a new coalition of allies or staging a news event to attract the public eye, all these things can build our power.

- What fits your capacity for action? It's also important that we pick actions that we can actually pull off. Planning an event or an action that is far beyond your reach can make you look weak to others and make you feel weak amongst yourselves. The key is to aim beyond your reach enough to force you and your allies to stretch, but not so far beyond your reach that you fail.

***JUMP TO EXERCISE #4
ON PAGE 38***

EVALUATE & CHANGE

An advocacy strategy, even a really smart one, is a guess that needs to be reworked along the way as it meets reality. Advocacy progress, however, is rarely simple and linear. It is not like walking in a steady line from one end of a block to the other.

Start by identifying the assumptions built into your strategy. Are you expecting media attention to spur action by politicians? Are you counting on a new set of allies to join the cause? By naming these assumptions at the start it becomes possible to check them as you move forward.

Then identify some 'signs of progress.' For example, if the goal is a new state law, those signs might start with private commitments of support from key lawmakers, then public ones, then formal proposals, then those proposals moving through

the process. By identifying the stepping stones that lead toward winning, it is possible to see if you are actually moving forward.

Finally, look at how to use this evaluation to make your advocacy stronger. Are your objectives too big or too small? Did you misread who has power? To be clear, advocacy does not come with any guarantees. But when we work together in a way that is smart, committed, and strategic, sometimes what we win can change the world.

**JUMP TO EXERCISE #5
ON PAGE 39**





FACING UP TO FACIAL RECOGNITION: CHANGING STRATEGIES AND WINNING BIGGER

In 2018, I discovered that our local school district in Lockport, New York, was planning to spend \$2.7 million to install a high-tech facial recognition surveillance system inside our schools – the first district in the nation to do so. The system was billed as a cutting-edge solution to school security. But after doing some basic research, I learned that it had no practical value as a security tool but did constitute a

whole new kind of threat to student privacy. I also learned that it was being purchased based on the representations of a salesman rather than any serious independent analysis.

As a parent, I made my case against purchase of the system in an opinion column in our local newspaper and in testimony before the Board of Education, with the basic message that it was a colossal waste of taxpayer

funds that made no one safer. The board announced that it has been working on the plan for two years and advanced it anyway.

Afterwards, as the district began implementing the project, I continued to make the case against the cameras, in local news articles and in a popular local Facebook group. Slowly, more people became aware and more people got angry, but the district just dug in its heels. So I decided to change strategy and make the issue a statewide one.

I reached out and formed a strong alliance with the New York Civil Liberties Union and we got national reporters interested at the Washington Post, Wired, the New York Times, and other publications, all of whom did

long national articles on our local battle. I wrote my own opinion article in the Times as well, generating even more national attention.

In 2019, that helped spark bills by two New York state lawmakers to ban facial recognition surveillance systems in schools across the entire state for two years. No system would be allowed, including Lockport's, until the implications on privacy and other matters could be fully studied. In 2020 the bill, a direct response to the Lockport project, was approved by the Assembly and Senate and signed into law by former Governor Andrew Cuomo. It not only shut off the Lockport system and prevented any more statewide, it also sent a strong cautionary message to school districts all across the country.◀



FIND YOUR POWER



Many years ago, at a political gathering in San Francisco, an older African-American civil rights activist offered a piece of wisdom from behind the speaker's podium that I never forgot. She asked, "What is the source of our power?" After a pause, she slowly began tapping her hand to her heart and said, "The source of our power comes from here, from inside, and flows outward from there." The reason that I never forgot those words is that they have proven so reliably true in all the years I have been an activist and worked with other activists.



**AS IMPORTANT AS IT IS TO
BE STRATEGIC AND SMART,
INFORMED AND CLEVER, OUR REAL
POWER COMES FROM WITHIN US –
FROM THE HEART.**

As important as it is to be strategic and smart, informed and clever, our real power comes from within us – from the heart.

It has been my privilege to work alongside skilled advocates with decades of experience, people who have won many battles and victories. But the people I have worked with closely who stick with me the most are those who were not seasoned advocates. They were thrust into it by circumstance and they turned out to be phenomenal.

I think of Oscar Olivera, the humble Bolivian factory

worker and union leader who was the fire behind the Cochabamba Water Revolt that shook a whole nation. I think of Candy Lightner, who turned the tragedy of her young daughter's death from a drunk driver into a national movement (Mothers Against Drunk Driving, MADD) that has saved tens of thousands of lives.

Activism is hard work. You might devote hours and hours to a cause and have it come to nothing. You might endure the humiliations of being discounted and ignored by people with power. You might suffer bouts of self doubt over

whether your efforts actually have any value. And if it is an issue that comes out of a searing personal experience – such as the loss of a loved one to police violence, gun violence, or needless illness – that makes it all the harder still.

Our power, in the end, comes from within and from our heart, from caring deeply enough about something wrong in the world to commit yourself to making it better. Smart strategy on top of that is about making sure our efforts have the best chance possible of succeeding, but

the power still comes from our commitment.

Activism and advocacy, at their best, should be a source of satisfaction. It is about working together in solidarity with people you admire and who share your core values, and listening to and learning from people who don't always think the same as we do. It is about making change you believe in and knowing that you are adding your own small contribution to the goals of justice and a better world. And that is never a waste of our time, energy, or power.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING WE BRING TO OUR ADVOCACY IS OURSELVES AND THE DEPTH OF OUR COMMITMENT TO MAKING THE WORLD BETTER!

WORKSHOP EXERCISES



These next pages feature workshop exercises that the Democracy Center regularly uses in its strategy planning sessions with advocacy groups. They are designed to be participatory and give everyone a chance to work together to look deeper at the group's strategy.

Generally, groups should allocate 45-90 minutes for each exercise, depending on how much time is allocated to small group work and how many small groups will be reporting back in plenary sessions. These exercises can be adapted to groups as small as 5-10 people and as large as 100.

→ EXERCISE #1

WHAT DO WE WANT?

Divide into small groups and give each group the following tasks:

1. Define the problem that you are trying to solve in a simple, clear, and people-focused way.
2. State in a general way what is needed to solve the problem you are working on, including what kind of system changes are needed to get to that solution.

3. Imagine it is one year in the future: What would you like to have won by that time that lays the groundwork for more?

4. Come back together and compare notes. See what each group produces, how those goals are different and why. Then collaborate and see how you can weave those different visions together into a description of 'what you want' in a way that has its full power.

→ EXERCISE #2

MAP THE POWER

Divide into small groups and give each group the following tasks:

1. Tape together a large sheet of paper and on it draw the power grid like the one in the illustration earlier in this booklet, with no actors listed.

2. On a set of blank cards in one color, identify the actors who have the formal authority over what you want. On a set of blank cards in a different color, identify the actors who have influence.

3. Discuss and position where each sits on the power grid and fasten the cards there.

4. Ask the question: If we could move three of those cards in some way (e.g. to make someone who is powerful more supportive), what would those changes be?

5. Back in full group, share your maps and discuss how to prioritize your advocacy targets.

→ EXERCISE #3

WHAT'S THE MESSAGE?

Divide into small groups and give each group the following tasks:

1. Decide on a scenario in which you will need to deliver your message. This could be a news conference, a meeting with a government official, a meeting with a potential ally, or something else.
2. Develop a maximum three minute message that captures your essential points in a clear and compelling narrative.
3. Designate two people in the group to be your messengers.

4. Have someone outside the group set up a small recording space in a quiet corner or room. Have the designated speakers role-play their presentation while the other person records it on a phone or camera. That person doing the recording, or someone else, can also role-play the person being presented to (e.g. a government official or reporter) and ask a question or two that might be expected in that circumstance.

5. Afterwards, show all the recorded role-plays in the full group and allow time after each one to discuss what worked best and what could be done better.

→ EXERCISE #4

PLANNING YOUR ACTION

Divide into small groups and give each group one of the following tasks, picking a time frame of six months to a year:

1. What information and materials do you need to produce?
2. What outreach do you need to do to potential allies, policy makers, the media, or others?

3. What activities will you organize (e.g. lobbying visits, vigils, media events, protests)?

4. Afterwards, look at the task lists you have generated and decide what you should do first.

5. Back in full group, share your plans.

→ EXERCISE #5

EVALUATE AND CHANGE

1. In your large group, hand out blank cards to everyone. Ask them to list some of the things (just one per card) that the group can track that are useful indicators of progress.

2. Then have people tape those cards onto a common wall in no specific order or organization.

3. As everyone in the group looks on, have a small group of people move those cards and ideas around into common categories (e.g. outreach to allies, growth of coalition, media attention, political support).

4. Look at those categories and indicators of progress and discuss what they tell you about the sequence of actions that you expect will deliver a victory.

5. Identify a specific list of those progress indicators that you can start to track. Also plan when you will look at those progress indicators together at a later date to evaluate your progress as you move forward.

→ **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

THE DEMOCRACY CENTER



*DEMOCRACY IS THE RIGHT OF
ALL PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND AND
INFLUENCE THE ISSUES THAT
SHAPE THEIR LIVES.*

The Democracy Center was founded in San Francisco in 1992 and for three decades we have worked across five continents to help activists for social and environmental justice become as powerful as they can be.

In our early years, we focused our efforts on immigrant rights, access to health care, and supporting the rights of poor people in California. We published a book on state initiative politics and founded a budget advocacy organization, the California Budget & Policy Center.

At the end of the 1990s, the Center moved to the heart of South America, Cochabamba, Bolivia, and was headquartered there for nearly twenty years. The Center brought the story of the Cochabamba Water Revolt to the world and helped lead the global campaign that forced the mighty Bechtel

Corporation to drop its \$50 million legal case against the Bolivian people.

Globally, the Center has supported and advised anti-apartheid campaigners in South Africa, indigenous communities in Latin America, and UNICEF teams in more than two dozen countries, among many others. Today, the Center is based in New York State, carrying out our mission of making activism matter, in a moment in which effective activism has never mattered more.

Jim Shultz is the founder and executive director of the Democracy Center. A graduate of UC Berkeley and Harvard University, he has served as staff to the California Legislature, as an advocate for Common Cause and Consumers Union, and as a global advocacy advisor to UNICEF. He is the author of four books, including the award-winning, *Democracy Owner's Manual*.

MAKING ACTIVISM MATTER

Advocacy is the art of getting the powerful to do what you want, from the community level to the global. But what makes an advocacy campaign successful?

This new booklet offers a simple and straightforward guide to building a winning strategy, drawn from thirty years of supporting advocates in the U.S. and all across the world.

"WE HAVE WORKED WITH THE DEMOCRACY CENTER FOR YEARS IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD. THEIR STRATEGIC ADVICE, DEEP KNOWLEDGE, AND DECADES OF EXPERIENCE IN EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY HAVE BEEN INVALUABLE."

FLORA ALEXANDER, CHIEF OF ADVOCACY, UNICEF

LEARN MORE ABOUT
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