

# ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

Handbook series for  
community-based organisations

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2006



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# ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION



## 1. Introduction

In a democratic society there are many different groups which might have competing interests. You need to make your voice heard and get your viewpoint across to achieve your vision. The formal terminology for this process is **advocacy, lobbying and communication**.

To do this most effectively, tools are available to community-based organisations (CBOs). Advocacy, lobbying and communication are the key approaches to ensure the community in which you work is best served by your CBO.

Many CBOs already use these tools very successfully. However, obstacles sometimes occur when CBOs operate on their instincts, rather than using more objective and structured tools to ensure their impact is as wide as possible. People expect CBOs to operate in a highly professional manner.

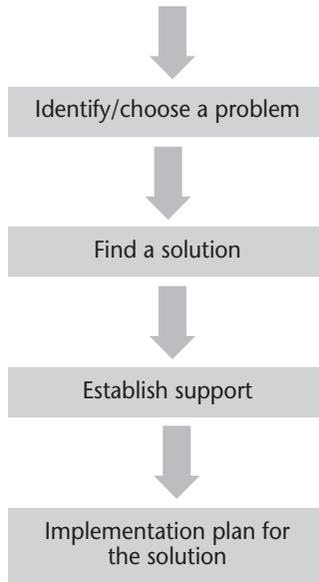
This notebook will help you and your CBO to ensure that you use these tools in the most effective way possible. We will look at advocacy, lobbying and communication as separate processes, but will also highlight the links between them. Often they are difficult to tell apart, but they need to work in harmony to ensure your campaigns are successful.

## 2. Advocacy

Advocacy means any action geared towards changing the policies, positions or programmes of any institution.

The first step is to identify a problem in a community. You need to understand all the aspects of the problem and find ways to help others to understand the problem fully. Then you can find ways to solve the issue.

Once everyone understands the issue clearly, you need to come up with a solution to that problem. You will need strong support for that solution and you will need an effective implementation plan to ensure your solution is correct.



In essence advocacy is about coming up with an argument to support the position you hold. This position or opinion will be to solve a problem.

### **3. Lobbying**

Lobbying is an attempt by citizens to influence others, particularly high-level public officials. Lobbying is one of the most common methods used by citizens to influence

public policy. It enables citizens to put pressure on politicians and government officials so that they take an interest in the people and support their community's cause.

In most democracies lobbying is recognised as a legitimate way for citizens to make their voices heard. However, critics of lobbying say that wealthy people and businesses are better able to spend more time on – and pay for – various lobbying strategies and activities and therefore have greater influence with public officials than ordinary citizens.



You will find that lobbying requires some level of formality. One aspect of lobbying is, of course, building relationships with those people who can influence the advocacy campaign that you are about to run. However, when lobbying government it is not simply a matter of knowing the right people and phoning or meeting them to get their support. You will need to ensure you have covered the following aspects:

- ◆ Determine the facts;
- ◆ Get as many different opinions on the matter as possible;
- ◆ Decide on one viewpoint that you want to follow;
- ◆ Convince the decision-makers;
- ◆ Draw up a formal submission;



- ◆ Get your submission in on time; and
- ◆ Be proactive – don't wait for the deadline before you start the lobbying process.

## **4. Communication**

You cannot run an advocacy campaign without good communication. Many campaigns often fail because the communication has not been clear or has not reached the people for whom it was intended. You must ensure that you use the appropriate method to communicate your message.

### **4.1. Understanding communication**

Communication involves sharing an idea or concept with interested parties. This can involve communication between two people, or between organisations, or between one organisation and many people.

As in any process you will need to determine what your goal is. The possibilities might be:

- ◆ To inform;
- ◆ To persuade;
- ◆ To motivate; or
- ◆ To entice people into action.

## **4.2. Steps in the communication process**

Communication is not just what one party wants to say to another. There are seven steps in the communication process. They are:

- 
- Step 1** Develop the idea you want to transmit;
  - Step 2** Convert the idea into suitable words or symbols for transmission;
  - Step 3** Transmit the idea by a method chosen, eg newsletter or meeting – make sure your message is appropriate for the receiver;
  - Step 4** Receiver gets the transmission;
  - Step 5** Receiver decodes the message – with luck exactly as it was sent and s/he understands it in the same way;
  - Step 6** Receiver accepts the message;
  - Step 7** Receiver uses the information – either by rejecting it or using it to act.
- 

To ensure your communication is successful and strategic you should ask yourself the following questions:

- ◆ Which audiences do we need to reach?
- ◆ Have we conducted an audience analysis?
- ◆ What do we want people who hear our message to do?
- ◆ What messages could be appropriate?
- ◆ Which channels of communication would be most appropriate?
- ◆ How will the communication process be monitored and evaluated?

## **5. Running a campaign**

A campaign includes all aspects of advocacy, lobbying and communication. To run a campaign you will need to follow a structured process. The following are the key steps to run any campaign:

### **5.1. Define your issue**

Usually when you decide to run an advocacy campaign you need to think about your issue very specifically. If you decide to tackle crime in your area, for example, you need to think about which aspect of crime you want to address. It would not be effective to tackle crime in general because the issue is too extensive. It would be better to be more specific and tackle a particular crime issue. Don't try to tackle too many issues at once. This can be confusing for those who you are trying to influence. Research has shown that single-issue campaigns are more effective.

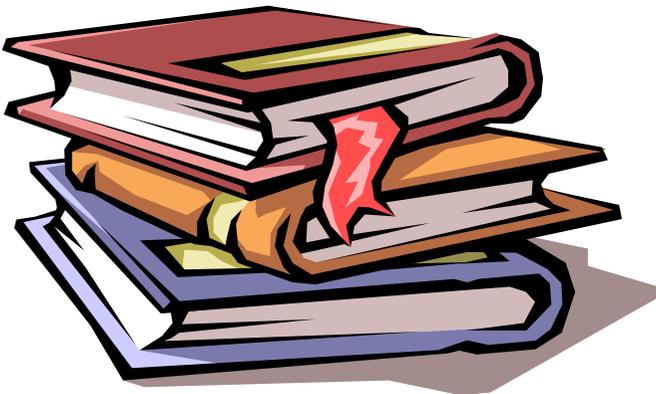
### **5.2. Understand your issue**

Make sure you understand the issue thoroughly.

If it is the first time you are dealing with a particular issue, you need to ensure you have examined all the background information you might need.

A thorough understanding of the issue will help you to decide on which areas you need to focus your campaign.

To understand your issue thoroughly, you will need to research it. Your research will depend on the issue your campaign decides to tackle.



Research is helpful in a number of ways: It can be used to:

- ◆ Affect the changes that can be made in a policy process;
- ◆ Assist you to choose an advocacy goal;
- ◆ Influence decision-makers directly;
- ◆ Inform the media, public or other organisations and institutions – they also could influence decision-makers;
- ◆ Support an existing advocacy position;
- ◆ Help you to find out what counter-arguments you might come across during your campaign;
- ◆ Change perceptions that people might have of the issue or problem you are tackling;
- ◆ Challenge myths and assumptions;
- ◆ Confirm policy and programmes that are in place elsewhere that work well; and
- ◆ Help you to reconsider strategies that are not working during your campaign.

### **5.3. Define a campaign objective**

It might sound simple to point out that your campaign should have an objective. However, your campaign objective should be simple and easily understandable by you, your organisation and the people you are trying to reach. You might find that, as you start working on your objective, it will need to be rewritten a number of times. This is a useful exercise because it will ensure that everyone in your CBO understands exactly what you are about to undertake.

It also will help you to choose the right strategies to use in your campaign.

An advocacy objective aims to CHANGE policies, programmes or positions of government, institutions or organisations.

It is about what YOU want to change, WHO will make the change, HOW and WHEN the change will take place.

All objectives should be SMART:

**S**pecific

**M**easurable

**A**chievable

**R**ealistic

**T**ime-specific

If your campaign is not working as effectively as you had hoped, you might want consider revisiting your objective.

#### **5.4. Choosing advocacy and lobbying strategies**

There are many different strategies and tactics available to people planning to run a campaign. Your strategies must match your objective.

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##### **Example**

You and your CBO have joined a number of organisations to advocate for a gun-free zone at your local high school. You decide to organise a barricade with burning tyres as part of your protest action against the number of assaults taking place at the school by young people carrying guns.

This strategy could work against you. Although you are trying to advocate an end to violence in schools, you are using violence yourself to achieve this. The result may be that people do not take you seriously.

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The following table is a list of possible activities you could choose for your campaign instead. When you decide what action to take, you must ensure you have adequate resources from which to draw to implement your activity successfully.

## ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATION

<b>Low-intensity activities</b>	<b>Medium-intensity activities</b>	<b>High-intensity activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✧ Writing to an Member of Parliament (MP) or your local councillor</li><li>✧ Sending out media releases</li><li>✧ Doing media interviews</li><li>✧ Having lunch with the editor or a senior reporter of a local newspaper</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✧ Producing a campaign newsletter</li><li>✧ Selling T-shirts, hats, badges and stickers to support the campaign</li><li>✧ Forming an alliance with a network of community organisations</li><li>✧ Paying for a newspaper advertisement</li><li>✧ Monitoring the local council</li><li>✧ Asking for a private meeting with the relevant councillor</li><li>✧ Persuading an opposition party councillor to ask a question at the council meeting</li><li>✧ Sending a written submission to the council</li><li>✧ Attracting the interest of an international non-governmental organisation (NGO), like Greenpeace</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✧ Lobbying members of the ward committee</li><li>✧ Organising a mass picket or boycott</li><li>✧ Organising a one-day strike in support of the campaign</li><li>✧ Taking the council to court</li></ul>

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The above activities fall into seven categories that make up the tools you have at your disposal to run your campaign. These categories are:

### **Information**

Gathering, managing and disseminating the information you find lays the basis for determining the direction of an advocacy campaign. Research is one way to gather information.

### **Media**

Various media can be used to communicate the campaign message to the different stakeholders.

### **Social mobilisation**

Mobilising the broadest support from a range of stakeholders, including the public, is essential to building the influence of the campaign.

### **Lobbying**

Convincing decision-makers who have the power to make the desired changes involves special knowledge and skills.

### **Litigation**

Sometimes using the court system to challenge a policy or law can reinforce an advocacy campaign.

### **Networks, alliances and coalitions**

Sharing information, resources and strengths in unity and commonality of purpose are key to the success of advocacy work.

Later in this notebook you will find an example that shows how, if planned and coordinated successfully, a campaign can use all of the tools in the toolkit.

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It is important to remember that in a democratic society we might have to accept that we cannot win every campaign we pursue. There are limits to the actions we can take. If we have problems with some of the laws or regulations in our country, we should not undertake illegal action, such as burning buildings. You will be more successful if you use other avenues, such as lobbying, to change the laws and regulations.

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### **5.5. Who are all the players and stakeholders?**

Different players and/or stakeholders might require different strategies. The same strategy that you use to

mobilise the youth in faith-based institutions will not be the same strategy you use to win over the local business community to your side.

The following list is the broad categories that you might need to target:

- ◆ Government;
- ◆ Civil society organisations;
- ◆ Union federations;
- ◆ Business;
- ◆ Faith-based institutions;
- ◆ The media; and
- ◆ The public.

You will not need to target all stakeholders or role players each time you run a campaign. You must decide who can help you the most to achieve the aims of your campaign.

**You must decide who your primary audience is and which sectors are your secondary audience. The primary audience is usually made up of decision-makers who have the power to make the changes you would like to see take place. The secondary audience is made up of the people who will help you to bring pressure on the decision-makers.**

Once you have decided on this you will need to 'unpack' each of the sectors. For example, you might find your primary audience is local government, but your secondary audience includes members of provincial and national government. You need to identify the specific players in each of the relevant spheres of government.

At a local government level you must decide if you should target the officials or the politicians? Do you need to target councillors from a particular sub-committee of council or only the chairperson of the sub-committee? If you want to target provincial government, have you

decided to target officials or do you need to target the director-general or will the deputy director of a particular department be the best person?

If you want to target Muslim youth is it best to speak to the Imam at the mosque or should you contact a local Muslim youth civil society organisation?

Your understanding of power also influences your decisions about who the most appropriate person might be. For example, there might be a person in the opposition party who does not hold an elected position, but who might have a lot of power because s/he has been a member of the party for a long time and might have a good network system.

### **5.6. Planning the campaign**

It is important to plan your campaign in as much detail as possible. There always will be unforeseen events that cannot be planned, but for those you can control, you should plan in detail.

You might have no financial resources for your campaign. If so, you might need to consider how you will recruit volunteers.

The *Project Management* notebook in this series will help you with the tools and techniques you need to plan effectively.

You might need to plan on an ongoing basis during your campaign because unexpected and unforeseen events unfold along the way. These might affect your campaign either positively or negatively and you have to learn how to deal with them.

When planning advocacy campaigns try to envisage all outcomes, good and bad. Try to have back-up strategies if one or more of your outcomes do not go according to plan.

### **5.7. Managing the campaign**

It is a good idea to set up a team to coordinate the campaign. There should be no more than three ‘captains’ or ‘managers’ of the team.

The managing team should ensure that they set up project teams to manage various aspects of the campaign. Team members and managers will have different skills that will be useful when managing the various aspects of the campaign.

Depending on the nature of the campaign, there might have to be some degree of secrecy so that you can maintain an element of surprise. For example, if you are planning a sit-in at a local clinic, you do not want word to get out because managers of the clinic will do their best to ensure you do not gain entry into the clinic.

Generally, though, you will want as many people as possible to know about your activities so that they can join you and give their support. Your message will be more effective if you are open and transparent.

### **5.8. Communicating the campaign**

There are five key areas to campaign communication:

#### **Audience**

Decide who your audience is and which strategy you need to communicate to that audience.

#### **Desired action**

You need to ask: what does our organisation want people to do when they get our message?

#### **Take-away message**

Good take-away messages focus on peoples’ needs rather than on the needs of your organisation. You need to help



them to answer the question: what does this have to do with me? Try to ensure that you get the message across by using as many different channels as possible.

The message should be culturally sensitive. For example, if you are trying to convince older people to practise safe sex you will not be able to use the same message that you would use to convey the message to young people.

### **Channels**

This refers to **how** you will deliver your message. Will you use meetings? Will you use radio or television or both? Will you use e-mail, newspapers, pamphlets, banners, etc? Supporting data will help – particularly if you need to do interviews on radio or TV, for example.

### **Evaluation**

You need to ensure that you monitor the effect of your message in the community and on the role players and stakeholders constantly, so that you can see if you are targeting the correct audience. If it is not effective you might need to make changes. You also need to keep track of what methods work and those that don't, so that you can evaluate the campaign effectively.

The communication of your message, your successes and the need for other steps or activities will contribute to the campaign enormously. This is probably the most critical aspect of any campaign. If possible you should try to get the help of professionals or students in the field of communication because this could help you to get your message across more effectively.



### **5.9. Acknowledging contributors**

People often work very hard to ensure a campaign is successful. Many are volunteers and give of their time freely with little personal compensation other than to see their principles and ideals achieved. Some donate money, services and/or goods. Donations often are the core to the success of any campaign. When the campaign is over you need to acknowledge the contributions of all the people involved. You might want to write a letter of thanks to individuals and organisations; you might consider inserting an advert in a local newspaper; or, if funds provide, you might hold a small party to thank participants.

Even if your campaign does not succeed, you need to acknowledge the contributions of all those involved. This simple step will encourage people to help the next time you run a campaign.

### **5.10. Evaluating the campaign**

Evaluating the overall campaign is a critical step. There are many different tools in the evaluation process. Remember to document as much of your campaign as possible. It might be a good idea to have daily or weekly evaluation sessions, depending on the nature of your campaign. Write up all the lessons you learn so that the next time you and your organisation plan a campaign it will be as effective as possible.

## **6. The TAC example**

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) is a good example of how an organisation uses advocacy, lobbying and communication to get its message across. Although the TAC is a national organisation, it also operates at community level and has many excellent lessons from which we can draw.

People who are living with HIV/AIDS started the TAC. This gave the organisation a lot of credence because its members are the number one authority on what it is like to live with HIV/AIDS.

The TAC has combined many different strategies. It built strong support at community level by running awareness workshops, establishing support groups and developing an effective home-based care network.

It has reached a wide South African audience and also is well known internationally. It has succeeded through organised protest marches, distribution of T-shirts and other promotional material and it has taken the

government to court over various issues. It even partnered the government in a court case against international pharmaceutical companies.

The TAC's campaign has been so successful that it is well established as both an organisation and a movement. It is well funded because of its various successes.

The TAC campaign has received many awards and recognition for its advocacy and lobbying work.

The TAC started with just a few people and now it is a major movement. Your campaign might not be on the same scale, but if you remain committed to your cause, your campaign could be as successful.

## **7. The RAPCAN example**

Resources and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN) launched a campaign programme to stop the closure of the Child Protection Units (CPUs).

RAPCAN first heard of the threat of the closure of CPUs from a television reporter in February 2001. The South African Police Services (SAPS) was trying to rationalise its specialised units to improve communication, make better use of resources and curb duplication of work. RAPCAN and others in the sector felt that the CPUs were among the specialised units that were, in fact, extremely over-stretched and under-resourced. They also felt that child abuse cases required specific conditions and staff training, as well as provision of child-friendly environments, and that a generalised special unit would not deal adequately with the abuse cases. RAPCAN believed that the closure of the CPUs would be in contravention of international and our own constitutional obligations towards children.

For six weeks RAPCAN was involved in a campaign to convince policy-makers in the police sector to withdraw the decision to close CPUs.

## **Defining aims and process**

Television exposure created awareness of the issue.

Thereafter organisations held a sectoral meeting to decide what to do, trying to clarify issues and information. The group formulated questions in the meeting, asking the SAPS for clarity, and agreed to try to set up a meeting with the SAPS. Interested NGOs in Gauteng and KZN held other meetings. Those attending the meetings exchanged ideas and, through discussion and consensus, a campaign strategy was decided. Ten organisations from around the country contributed. A set of questions were drawn up to be sent to the SAPS.

The organisations tried to see the Minister of Social Development, but to no avail. They also sent him a letter, but had no response. A parliamentary monitor in the group noticed that the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) was meeting the SAPS and asked to be involved.

Members of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) discovered that this particular NCOP committee seemed to be in touch with many people on the ground and they had a positive meeting with the committee chairperson.

## **Partnerships**

RAPCAN is part of the Children and Violence Forum, composed of national and provincial government representatives, NGOs, welfare organisations and university-linked organisations.

All of these stakeholders were informed about the issues from the inception of the campaign; this was made a whole lot easier using e-mail. Each centre (Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban) had one person responsible for communication; this helped to keep everyone informed and committed.

### **Strengths and opportunities**

The issue was clear and easily identifiable. An individual educated on parliamentary process was closely involved in the campaign and found out about relevant committee meetings on the issue, which allowed for intervention. E-mail strengthened the campaign's capacity to keep stakeholders informed.

### **Barriers/challenges**

The campaign group found that the chair of the portfolio committee was unwilling to meet it and the minister did not respond to letters or requests. The group persisted in finding other options for intervention.

### **Tools**

RAPCAN and others used television to publicise the issues; electronic media to keep stakeholders informed; networking with other organisations to raise and formulate the appropriate questions to the SAPS; lobbying of the chairperson; and sending of submissions to the NCOP committee and the SAPS. The use of these tools were successful. Others that were not so successful, but also tried, were letters to the minister, and attempts to meet him and the chairperson of the portfolio committee.

### **Budget**

The campaign had no budget and relied on individuals and organisations to volunteer their time.

### **Lessons learnt**

RAPCAN learnt that cross-sectoral and strong advocacy from networks made a critical difference. Its issue was clearly identifiable and had a defined time limit. It learnt to use e-mail effectively and also gained some

understanding of Parliament and how to approach parliamentarians. It found this was vital when embarking on such a campaign.

### **Impact**

The impact of the campaign on RAPCAN was that it and others in the sector felt that they could make a difference to ensure that children's rights would be protected and that their voices could be heard. The network with which RAPCAN works was strengthened.

The result of the campaign was that the CPUs were **NOT** closed down. The SAPS made a public statement at Human Rights Commission hearings that CPUs would not be closed.

## **8. Conclusion**

The tools that are mentioned in this notebook should help you and your CBO to focus your attention and resources in a structured manner. It is our hope that your organisation will reap the benefits for both you and your community. Through strengthening the capacity and abilities of your CBO to advocate, lobby and communicate, we believe that democracy will be strengthened.

It is also critical that you consult some of the other notebooks in this series to enable you to run campaigns effectively, such as the *Project Management*, *Fundraising and Proposal Writing* and *CBOs and Mobilisation* notebooks. These will help you to run a well-resourced and well-managed campaign.

The key to all advocacy and lobbying initiatives is experience. You will make mistakes, but you will learn from them and the next campaign you tackle will go more smoothly.

Good luck! You will find that advocacy, lobbying and communication can be rewarding and exhilarating. You

will achieve many objectives. And, as with all new skills, you will become better with time as you build up your network and learn from your mistakes and your successes.

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