

A Practical Guide to Advocacy Campaigns: The Romanian Experience

Advocacy Academy



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The Center for International Private Enterprise is a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy. CIPE has supported more than 1,000 local initiatives in over 100 developing countries, involving the private sector in policy advocacy and institutional reform, improving governance, and building understanding of market-based democratic systems. CIPE provides management assistance, practical experience, and financial support to local organizations to strengthen their capacity to implement democratic and economic reforms. CIPE programs are also supported through the United States Agency for International Development.

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The opinions expressed in this publication are the Advocacy Academy's own and do not necessarily reflect the positions of supporting organizations or individuals.

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About the Advocacy Academy

The mission of the Advocacy Academy is to influence public policy on behalf of civil society. The academy was formed in 2002 by five business organizations as an experimental pilot project for Eastern and Central Europe with technical assistance and financial support from the Center for International Private Enterprise. The Advocacy Academy introduces innovative instruments for participative democracy, an essential factor for catalyzing institutional reforms in Romania. It facilitates public consultations, advocates the interests of the Romanian private sector and larger civil society, promotes transparency in public decisions and open access to public information, and develops and conducts advocacy training programs for groups in Bulgaria, Croatia, and Serbia. Drawing on these experiences, it has established a Masters Program in Public Politics and Advocacy in cooperation with West University of Timișoara.

Based on its reputation and quality of work, the Advocacy Academy has been appointed by the Romanian Prime Minister as a member of the Romanian Economical and Social Council and as a consultant at the European Economic and Social Council, represented by chairman Radu Nicosevici.

Introduction

Background

In 1992, I had discovered democracy with fervor and was trying to understand how this new system worked. I decided to jump right into the middle of democracy and registered as a volunteer at my district's electoral office. I will always remember that Sunday that I volunteered – along with many others – at the entrance of our local voting location. Most of the other volunteers were older people who had heard that they could receive some income for such work. Our responsibilities were shared by the team and my job was to ink the voting stamp and to pass it to voters. I did my job silently, but was curious to learn everything concerning the elections.

From early morning until late in the evening, in front of the old table used as a voting station, I offered each of the many voters the stamp smeared in cheap ink. I saw each voter's face close up, studied their expressions, and felt their emotions. I began to understand. But then, suddenly, there was a mother bringing her son in wheelchair. The mother entered the voting room beside her son, a young man suffering physically and psychologically, and expressed their democratic rights on two election cards. One for her and another for her son. In that moment I realized that my vote was equal to that of the suffering young man. I questioned how my vote – informed by my hours of study about political parties, doctrines, and elections – could be equivalent with that of the young man.

But I have learned, over the years, that while there is no perfect system of governance, democracy is the only system that has proved its viability. It can be criticized, attacked, and discussed, but it can't be denied. Aristotle said that democracy is preferable; it's less evil than all the other forms of governance, as it splits the power among many people. As any good thing, functional and verified in some places some of the time, in our places it might fail. Leaders everywhere are tempted with power. Politicians may engage in petty corruption and fall into full-sized business scandals, cheapening the system that elected them to office.

It is not just corrupt leaders who should concern us, it is also an apathetic public. The biggest threat to Romanian democracy does not come from uninformed voters, but from those who have no interest in voting or the democratic process at all. “I’m so sick of politics. I don’t want to hear about politicians any more – they can do whatever they want to. I’m busy making money; I don’t have time for politics,” are words which are heard more and more often in Romania. Educated people, who know what democracy represents, are tired of the political scandals so prevalent in Romania. Yet this negative attitude sustains the activities of irresponsible politicians, because no one is interested in holding these leaders accountable. Further, while a full-scale communist regime isn’t likely, small-scale communist structures and tiny areas of influence are resurrecting everywhere, undermining the illusion of a stable society.

This general lack of involvement in civil society is social suicide. Skipping the vote and justifying apathy by the incompetence of politicians is a destructive plan. Vadim, Becali, and the OTV are increasingly popular. While their influence may be no more significant than in any other transitional society, the retreating interest of civil society in promoting democracy is concerning. If we aren’t careful, we will have left democracy in the hands of those who care little for the principles on which it is based and the society it protects.

Tudor Flueraş

Project Development: Romanian Capacity for Advocacy

Romania joined the rest of Southeastern Europe in the early 1990s to swap its centralized system for participative democracy. The first steps toward democracy were free elections and freedom of expression. These steps were necessary, but were not sufficient in instituting real democracy. Democracy implies active participation on the part of civil society. Citizens’ involvement in the public policymaking process is the very basis for the trust a constituency puts in their elected officials. There must be consistent checks and balances within policymaking from the local to national levels, not just at elections. This active involvement goes far beyond the public confidence shown in the electoral process.

Romania’s existing legal framework is a direct result of the efforts of civil society to make its voice heard in public policy. Practical experience shows, however, that civil society’s approach was accidental, unsystematic, and unprogrammed. It led in many cases to only partial results or failed experiments. The Advocacy Academy has directly addressed this gap by acting as a guide toward professionalism and consistency in the advocacy process.

A well-informed civil society actively engaged in the decision-making processes is the base on which meaningful democracy is constructed. When a community or country is developing toward democracy and a free market economy, its progress is reflected by how well citizens understand their responsibility to make their opinions heard in public, and by how well they are able to identify and recommend solutions to the problems they encounter.

One area for improvement in Romania that has been identified by the Advocacy Academy is business leaders' and public officials' level of knowledge about transparency in legislative processes. The Advocacy Academy prepares business and political leaders for constructive dialogue and provides them with the proper instruments for democratic reform and practical implementation.

A study performed by the Advocacy Academy showed the need for training sessions on: advocacy techniques, public consulting mechanisms, economic policy, political analysis, cost/profit analysis, the legislative process, public presentation techniques, leadership, coalition building, media relations, ethics, and good governance.

The Advocacy Academy developed training sessions for each topic with the anticipation that the program's graduates would be able to immediately apply the techniques learned. The graduates studied each other's programs and provided feedback for further development of the Advocacy Academy. Graduates' experiences were also incorporated into this practical advocacy guide published for Romanian civil society.

What Does Advocacy Mean?

Civil Society

Very often, when we are questioned about what civil society represents, we answer by using very general terms – that *we are* civil society, private citizens in the public decision-making process. Civil society is the space in which policy dialogue occurs outside of formal politics. Civil society may take an active or passive role in actual policymaking, and may be sub-divided into smaller groups around different interests. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), business associations, academia, and the media are all part of civil society.

Public Policy

Public policy addresses a range of issues, and is built in the interest of a community, region, state, etc. Issues are analyzed and incorporated into a legislative plan that contains objectives and established deadlines in order to solve problems, introduce reform, and generally make life better for the majority of citizens. Civil society helps bring these issues to the attention of policymakers. Examples of issues that may be taken up by civil society are small- and medium-sized enterprise development, health, social welfare, environmental protection, labor, or demographic change. The responsibility for changing public policies rests on political parties. Parties are given the mandate and authority by voters to develop and apply policy.

Citizen Involvement in Public Decisions

Democratic governance implies the involvement of citizens in public decisions. This does not mean that involvement is an obligation for everyone who benefits from public decisions; rather, it is an exercise of citizens' constitutional right to direct the policies that affect their lives.

In Romania, the transition from a centralized system to a democratic one has, unfortunately, not concentrated on programs and priorities built around improving the dialogue between policymakers and citizens. Policymakers have often taken the misguided view that, once elected, they are no longer obligated to ask for voters' opinions. Citizens have given their trust to elected officials, believing that these leaders always think and act in support of citizens' interests; consequently, they do not feel the need to have direct involvement in the policymaking process.

Attempts to organize public meetings, debates, and other consulting formulas have often been made without committed organization advised by experience elsewhere – leading to discontent, distrust, and frustration for citizens and policymakers. Lacking professionalism and strategy, this approach was unstable, expensive, and had little effect.

The current Romanian legislative framework, which is more transparent, encourages civil society to take an active part in the development and implementation of public policy; meanwhile, group interests are being identified and addressed. Other features include:

- A transparent policymaking process that directly sustains the anti-corruption program through citizen participation.
- Direct contact between policymakers and voters through public consulting on major legislative reform.
- Policymakers have access to case studies from civil society.
- Through public consulting mechanisms, the legislative process is more public, which will lead to an improved image of legislative structures in Romania. Citizens are convinced that they are more directly involved in the policymaking process.

Benefits for Civil Society

- The public consulting mechanisms allow civil society the possibility to express their views regarding legislation in a professional debate.
- It will be less difficult for civil society to participate in the reform process, and civil society may be more willing to accept compromises they know have been reached equitably.
- Civil society will no longer be able to express its disapproval concerning a disappointing reform project if it has not already made an attempt to express its point of view.
- Civil society will be more responsible regarding the legislative process.

The Romanian Public Consultation Process:

- is a transparent platform for citizens to express their opinions; all a citizen needs is access to e-mail.

- assures greater involvement by the public and private experts in legislative activities.
- presents opportunities to gauge public opinion.
- contributes a diverse set of opinions to debate.
- increases access to expert analysis from international sources.

Advocacy

Advocacy, as it relates to public policy, is the process by which legislation is introduced and influenced. Advocacy means efficient communication with policymakers on the part of civil society. Efficient communication implies a clear and sustained message, put forth by affected interested groups and transmitted to policymakers in good faith that it will be considered.

The efficient advocacy process requires a systematic approach. It is dependent on an informed and committed advocacy group. Ideally, all groups affected by a public decision should analyze the possible solutions and approaches that might best be employed to persuade the policymakers. Policymakers are, in the simplest terms, concerned about votes and also resources. So, among other issues, every advocacy program must relate its proposed solutions to policymakers' interests, such as votes and public resources.

The Policymakers' Premise

If individual policymakers want to remain in a leading position they must gain the support of the public/civil society.

- Support cannot be obtained without costs.
- Support can be given in exchange for benefits from the government, or in the aim of influencing the government.
- If the government as a whole does not have support, it will lose its authority.
- Without authority, the government cannot implement its decisions.

To practice politics means to negotiate, to make transactions, and to compromise between different sides and positions. Civil society groups are included among these sides and positions. Advocacy campaigns are an ensemble of actions concerning a certain theme, directed towards political actors in the aim of influencing public decisions to the benefit of those advocating a certain position.

Who can develop advocacy campaigns?

An advocacy campaign can be appropriately developed and applied by interested groups of civil society with all three of the following characteristics:

- they are legitimate,
- they are representative, and
- their daily mission is affected by the public decision.

Why is it that only interest groups should approach advocacy campaigns?

Policymakers are interested in issues related to general interest problems – implying a broad group of beneficiaries. Interest groups are the most efficiently positioned to bring specific issues to policymakers' attention.

Why should we initiate advocacy campaigns?

Advocacy campaigns are usually initiated by structured forms of civil society, in particular, organizations that are being sustained by their members. These structures are formed with a concrete mission toward which all members voluntarily contribute. One responsibility of these organizations concerns the defense of its members in relation to public policy. Advocacy campaigns can advance the protection of an organization's members.

What is gained through the advocacy process?

A successful advocacy process will:

- promote an organization's values, beliefs, and mission.
- promote an organization's "voice," bringing to policymakers' attention the issues that affect the organization's members.
- influence the reform process and public policies in an organization's interest domain.
- defend member interests.

What does an organization need to be effective in the advocacy process?

Foremost, an organization needs committed members to be effective in the advocacy process – from identifying issues to conducting a campaign. Individual members who are determined to defend their interests voice their concerns to the organization's strategic core (the administrative council, board of directors, or management), to raise support. If a concern is shared by the majority of members, it will likely become an advocacy campaign theme. The organization should be prepared to act by developing some fundamental abilities:

Strength to initiate

The organization must have the capacity to act and to introduce recommendations into public debate. It must be oriented towards concrete and measurable results.

Relationship with members

The organization must have the capacity to work for and with its members. An organization's members must have the capacity to teamwork. The organization must be able to create consensus among its members. The participation of an organization's members will confirm the principle, "more people means more power."

Appropriate selection of advocacy themes

The organization must identify, analyze, categorize, and rank those issues that affect the interests of its members. An organization's leaders must have the capacity to solicit feedback from members in this process. Once identified and ranked, these issues will constitute the thematic map for the organization's advocacy activities. Members will want to become involved in advocacy activities that are appropriately selected by an organization.

Research

The organization must have the ability to collect pertinent information from its members and outside sources to sustain and refresh the identified advocacy theme. Without timely information, an organization will be unable to draw the interest of policymakers. With this input, policymakers will be able to see that the problem is real, contemporary, and must be solved. The organization might use external sources for accomplishing this research.

Strategy and action plan development

The organization should develop a strategy and an advocacy action plan. It should integrate knowledge and resources (informational, human, time, logistic, and financial) for implementing the most appropriate strategic actions toward a defined set of goals.

Management

The action plan should be implemented in the most efficient way. The action plan should be informed by an evaluation of the organization's capacity to mobilize members in advocacy efforts, the available resources, and the leadership and management that will be needed in the process.

Evaluation of lessons learned

In developing strategy and an action plan, an organization should examine lessons learned from previous experiences. It should also assess its evaluation capacity and include an evaluation plan with its action plan. The ability to transmit this information to its members, so the knowledge may be used in future actions, is key to good evaluation practices. Evaluation of experiences is one of the most important elements of the advocacy process.

Celebrating and recognizing the common effort

Advocacy coordinators must recognize that successes and failures are shared by everyone in an advocacy campaign. Each person has an active role, regardless of how small their contribution to the process, even if they are simply a supporter.

Recognizing the advocacy process as a common effort will generate members' sustained support for future actions, attract new supporters, and show policymakers and civil society that the group is a viable force. Celebrating the end of various stages in the advocacy process is useful for members – and policymakers and other supporters,

too – even if the result of that stage was not quite satisfactory. It helps everyone to mark progress in the advocacy campaign. This approach will also raise the public profile of the organization, which will be useful in future advocacy campaigns.

The Advocacy Campaign

Forming the Advocacy Committee

Developing an advocacy strategy in membership-based organizations is absolutely necessary if “the defense of member interests” is truly the goal of an organization. For the most effective advocacy, an organization should establish an advocacy committee to guide the advocacy strategy and process. The committee comprises organization members, who may also be part of the organization’s administration and management. The committee does not need more than five to seven members, but they should represent the organization’s most important areas of interest.

The advocacy committee’s role is to develop and apply the organization’s advocacy strategy. Committee members must possess certain qualities and capacities in order to ensure the advocacy program’s success. The committee should:

- Become acquainted with legislative mechanisms
- Focus on solutions and be capable of overcoming obstacles
- Be creative
- Develop their leadership capacity
- Cultivate good communication and persuasion skills
- Maintain good relations with policymakers
- Work toward cooperation with different groups
- Take responsibility in the organization’s name
- Be committed to the cause
- View failure as part of the process of achieving a goal (without looking for scapegoats)
- View success as a result of the group effort
- Maintain vision (both long- and mid-term)

The advocacy committee should be led by a person chosen and accepted by the comprising members. This person's responsibilities are oriented towards organizing and evaluating the advocacy process, and coordinating the organization's advocacy committee.

The advocacy committee should have financial and logistical resources at its disposal, and, depending on the organization's size and the scope of the advocacy activities, a bigger or smaller executive team. The committee's executive team implements the strategy and plan developed by the advocacy committee. The executive team should have:

- Developed abilities in the investigation and research of member problems
- Developed abilities in public relations and mass-media communications
- Background in marketing
- Ability to develop and maintain good relations with political experts and policymakers
- Abilities in process development and management
- Ability to work with a team
- Ability to document and report on activities
- Ability to liaise and coordinate with other similar organizations
- Ability to identify relevant areas of the legislative process as it relates to member interests

Developing the Legislative Agenda

The first step towards developing a strong advocacy strategy is developing the organization's legislative agenda. The legislative agenda is a publication designed for a broad audience – the public – that presents the set of issues with which members are concerned and identifies areas in need of legislative change.

The legislative agenda is the fundamental instrument for defending the interests of the organization's members. The agenda's initial development is a systematic and laborious process, which may take an entire semester or even a year, depending on members' involvement with the organization. The process of developing the agenda gives the organization a clear understanding of member interests in the context of the legislative framework within which they act, and allows the organization to identify and inventory possible obstacles members face.

Members' feedback is solicited to confirm these findings, and will help the organization prioritize concerns for action. Feedback can be obtained through a questionnaire, in which members rank the issues by using prioritized criteria and then propose possible solutions for each problem area. The success of this approach depends on a well-developed questionnaire: it must be accurate, simple, and accessible for all members – regardless of their degree of knowledge concerning the legislative framework.

Focus groups help identify and prioritize members' legislative problems. An effective focus group meeting results in the identification of legislative problems and possible solutions, ranked by priority. These two methods may be combined, so that by the end of this stage, the advocacy committee and its executive team have a workable list of problems and possible solutions.

Priorities Selection and Analysis

In this stage, issues for action are prioritized using information obtained from members. Priority issues are identified when:

- The issue is relevant to the majority of members.
- Solving the problem would have immediate benefits for members.
- The problem can be found on the public agenda; this is a guarantee that the problem is also being considered by policymakers.
- There are viable solutions/recommendations identified for the problem.
- There are enough resources to start the advocacy process.

Issues that are relevant to only a small number of members, or that require a long period of time and many resources, should be eliminated, especially if there has never been another legislative agenda developed within the organization before. An organization should work on issues for which it can conduct a successful advocacy process. This success will prove to members that advocacy delivers benefits.

In this stage, solutions are not developed extensively. Possible solutions are developed only when they are assessed by the following criteria:

- Will the solutions improve the conditions for members?
- Will the solutions generate support for the organization from the majority of members?
- Are the solutions in line with the organization's mission?
- Are the solutions realistic and actionable?
- Are the solutions understandable for different audiences?
- Would the solution create unfair conditions for other interest groups?
- Is this a problem that has been identified by the public?
- Would the solution's approach be in members' interest?
- Would the solution attract other members in the future?

Once all of these elements have been considered, the legislative agenda can be approved by the organization's leadership team, and it becomes the strategic advocacy document of the organization. A short publication that outlines the legislative priorities and identified solutions can be distributed to members, policymakers, and other special interest groups.

Taking into account that the environment in which an organization exists is extremely dynamic, the legislative agenda must be periodically re-examined and updated in order to reflect members' priorities. Once initiated, this review will have a continuous character, and will help in maintaining the relationship between the organization and its members. The document can be used in attracting new resources, and in helping an organization identify itself as a legitimate and respected element of civil society.

The advocacy committee regularly reviews and develops programs, applicable tactics, useful instruments, and necessary resources in respect to each theme of the legislative agenda (also considering the identified priorities). The committee will develop a budget for a strategy that is realistic and relevant (and regularly reviewed).

Developing an Advocacy Campaign around an Identified Theme

The legislative agenda helps identify a certain theme around which an advocacy campaign can be developed. (Remember, a good advocacy campaign progresses in three fundamental stages: preparation – 50 percent, implementation – 30 percent, and evaluation – 20 percent. While time consuming, solid preparation is essential for success.) Choosing this theme involves a deep examination of:

- The organization's internal capacity concerning the chosen theme
- Whether or not the theme is a priority for the organization's members.
- The organization's capacity to conduct the advocacy campaign
- The political environment's capacity to bear the changes
- The external environment's capacity to sustain the changes

Step 1: Supporting the position document

In this stage, priorities are confirmed and a possible solution is developed in detail in a position document. The organization conducts extensive analysis to determine how the issue relates to the surrounding legislation and legislative framework, what would be the chosen solution's specific advantages (more work places, raising salaries, increased social funds), and how the chosen solution could have an impact on other structures. The proposed solution is compared to solutions implemented in other countries or regions. The organization's resources and capacity, as well as the amount of information available, will determine how extensively the campaign theme can be evaluated, but this should be done to the greatest extent possible. The research results and consequent arguments are collected in what is called a position document [concerning *x* theme].

This document is the base of the advocacy campaign. The purpose of this phase is not only to inform the creation of a position document, but also to demonstrate to the public and to policymakers that the organization is well-informed. This will help the organization's position in convincing policymakers that the proposal has advantages for the general interest. Consequently, if the organization does not have the capacity to carry out sufficient examination – even if it has strong public support

– the organization must find other groups with which to cooperate. Universities, think tanks, or economic research institutes might all be approached for their cooperation. Cooperation would follow certain conditions agreed to by both sides.

Beyond this, there are many sources accessible through the Internet, including studies, comparative analyses, and reports of international organizations. An organization might use these sources throughout the advocacy process.

Step 2: Examining the external environment

The external environment is policymakers' relation to and previous action on the chosen advocacy issue. The organization must be aware of the public agenda where the chosen theme has been included. This type of information helps the organization prepare a more specific strategy and to estimate policymakers' initial degree of acceptance. Based on this evaluation, it is also possible to prepare for arguments meant to block the advocacy effort. Through this preparation, the organization can prevent waste of resources, using solid and well-directed arguments from the beginning.

Another idea is to develop a political forces map. An organization is better able to prepare its positions, actions, resources, and messages if it is informed about the positive and negative political influences surrounding it. Current knowledge of the external environment helps an organization choose the right legislative path for influencing the decision that will bring change.

Step 3: Examining the effects of the advocacy campaign

Every issue examined in public debate has direct and indirect beneficiaries, and possibly also groups that may feel affected negatively. An organization must identify and analyze all of these groups from the very beginning of the advocacy process, in order to avoid or manage confrontations with potential adversaries and to share resources (and also responsibilities) with possible allies. Combined with the knowledge of the external environment gained in Step 2, the organization can better manage its position in the external environment.

Step 4: Evaluating the organization's capacity

After developing a strategy, the organization must determine if it is capable of implementing the plan for the advocacy campaign. In this step, the advocacy committee must answer the following questions:

- Is the organization able to use this approach alone?
- Does the organization have enough available resources?
- Is the moment right for this approach?
- Does the organization have enough contacts (or a database of potential contacts) within the policy community for this approach?
- Does the campaign have enough support?
- What is the media's angle on the campaign theme? Does the organization have enough media contacts at the right level?

The organization's capacity evaluation must contain detailed answers to these questions. These questions also reveal weak points in an organization's capacity, and will help the organization to know when it is ready for the campaign and also how it is faring throughout the duration of the campaign (through re-assessment).

Step 5: Building a coalition

An advocacy coalition comprises groups of civil society that cooperate to more effectively influence legislation. Coalitions play an important role in the development of public policy. The following are considered the most significant reasons to build coalitions:

- Through numbers, a coalition emphasizes the need for change concerning a certain issue. Coalitions catch the attention of policymakers and the media. This recognition encourages dialogue between parties and generates solutions. By unifying the forces and the message, the coalition might advocate a solution and see results more efficiently and more quickly than a single organization.
- A coalition creates the opportunity for building relations between its comprising organizations, public officials, and the media.

The coalition's members should be aware of the importance of their combined efforts in the aim of developing relationships based on trust – relations capable of generating unity and access. Credibility also results from a unified message promoted by the coalition's members relayed via the media. If the issue concerns a wider geographic area and many interested groups, it is even more likely that it will attract the interest of the media and policymakers.

Building an Advocacy Campaign

Relation + Information = Access

Access + Process = Results

Results + Monitoring + Communication = Credibility

Credibility x Time = Power

Coalitions can be of several types, depending on their mission and interests. They can be sector-based or multisector-based. They may be developed around a specific goal, or as an experiment in new associative structures. Each of these types has its own advantages and disadvantages depending on the issue at hand. In Romania, the most successful coalitions were the informal variety brought together towards a common goal. Regardless of the coalition's structure, its leadership and management must be discussed and agreed to by the coalition's comprising parts.

Step 6: Developing a unified advocacy campaign message

At each stage of the advocacy campaign, it is important to reinforce the campaign message to all target groups. The message of the campaign should be clear and unified. A good way to test the content and presentation of the message is to circulate it among a special group of stakeholders who can give feedback before it is released more widely.

It is also helpful to create an identifiable logo/motto for the campaign. These symbols of the campaign should be identifiable by different audiences in different environments.

Step 7: Building relations with the media

Using the media in an advocacy campaign is crucial for reaching the campaign goals. A careful analysis by the press offers an important opportunity for the campaign. Unfortunately, the selection of news by the media is often unpredictable. Campaign planners must start building good relations with the media from the very beginning. They must construct a strong communication system with the media to ensure the campaign's success (see Appendix 1).

The strategic approach in relation to the media defines:

The action territory

The media should be alerted as to where and in what scope the advocacy campaign will occur. This helps transmit a coherent message and maintain direction.

The problem

The problem must be defined and communicated clearly in its entirety to media contacts. This will help avoid confusion in relation to the problems, symptoms, and solutions.

The communication plan

There should be a clear plan for communicating with the media, including what will be communicated, and when the communication will occur. The organization should analyze its capacity to follow this communication plan, and if there are weaknesses, those should be addressed.

Who to talk to

Most advocacy campaigns focus on promoting their message through mass media because it is powerful enough to inspire change. Mass media is used for mobilizing supporters to more actively promote the campaign and for recruiting new supporters even before it is used to influence decision-makers. While the media can be very useful in campaigns, it cannot replace a well-planned and organized communications strategy. An efficient advocacy campaign uses various channels of influence and communication, and the media is just one of them.

Likewise, a message will be designed for the media depending on the specific target audience. If a message is sent to policymakers, it must address the two essential needs of politicians: votes and money. If the message is being directed to allies or supporters, it must emphasize values. Only by specific design will a campaign deliver effective messages (see Appendix 2).

What to say

The message does not have to be a catchphrase or a motto, but it must transmit an essential idea that can be formulated in various ways so it can be sent to different groups

(policymakers or supporters). The message should be short, clear, precise, emotional, and visual. At the same time, the message must convey the problem that needs to be solved (and the proposed solution). It is useful to test a message before sending it out. A close circle of supporters, friends, and even supportive family members might be used to test the message, and their feedback can be used for improving the message. It is then useful to test the message among a group of people that may have no connection with your campaign or issue. If those people understand the message and are convinced of its importance, then a group can be assured that it has found a successful message for the advocacy campaign.

How to use the media

There are several ways of promoting the message through the media:

- **press release:** It is a simple and inexpensive way of sending a message, but can be inefficient. Press releases are often not enough to get the attention of a news source, and certainly transmitting the press release by mail or fax will not assure its presence in the media.
- **radio and TV appearances:** Radio and TV appearances ensure good transmission of the message, but can be quite difficult to accomplish. To achieve members' presence on a TV or radio show, a group needs good relationships with the producers and editors of these media outlets. Personal contacts will help convince these people that the campaign is relevant and interesting to the public.
- **interaction with radio and TV shows:** Even if a campaign is not invited to appear on a radio or TV show, it is possible to still use these outlets by participating in shows relevant to the subject through a phone call during the show.
- **contact with reporters:** Every opportunity of being in touch with reporters must be maximized by consistently providing journalists with updated information concerning the campaign.
- **letters to the editor:** When a publication has a certain interest concerning the subject of the advocacy campaign, the campaign can express their views through a letter addressed to the publication's editor. The letter should be relatively short – no more than 2,000 to 3,000 characters – though it may be reduced further by the publication. Even if the entire letter is not published, it is still a good opportunity to be mentioned in print or contacted for more details. Individuals should remember to sign the letter and mention the organization they represent.
- **public events:** If a public event is organized by the advocacy campaign, inviting journalists is a great opportunity to promote the campaign and increase its visibility. Invitations should be far enough in advance for journalists to make arrangements, and it is strongly recommended to confirm an RSVP by phone.

- **press conferences:** The press conference an expensive but efficient way to use the media. At a press conference, there is direct contact with journalists and the campaign's message is transmitted in exactly the way the campaign designed it.
- **paid publicity:** Paid publicity is an expensive but sometimes inefficient method. It assures the presence of the message in its desired form, but the credibility of the message is not necessarily evident. Paid publicity is most efficiently used to make an important public announcement or invitation for campaign members (see Appendix 3).

Step 8: Developing the advocacy campaign strategy

A strategy can be oriented towards information, cooperation, or confrontation, depending on the identified issue. The campaign approach depends on the campaign team, the external environment, the obstacles to overcome, resources, mobilization, and the presence (or absence) of a coalition. A graphic representation of the information gathered and processed in previous steps can assist in developing a specific strategy.

Step 9: Developing the action plan

The action plan follows the campaign's strategy. Again, graphics and tables that lay out the design for each activity can be useful for delegating responsibility, distributing resources, determining costs, and evaluating criteria.

Step 10: Determining the precursory steps for settling the campaign

When the organization selects the advocacy campaign team and begins its research, it will also monitor the policymaking environment in order to avoid wasting resources for a theme that has already been proposed to the public agenda. The development of a large informational network is recommended; this network should gauge target groups' reactions and levels of media support. Organizing public debates concerning the advocacy theme is also useful for promoting the advocacy campaign.

Step 11: Implementing the action plan

Implementing the advocacy campaign requires continuous coordination and evaluation of each stage of the action plan. External factors are in continuous flux, and call for the control criteria for the entire system. External reactions must be monitored and evaluated so the campaign message remains clear and consistent. A process manager is one of the most important people for the campaign's success. During the campaign, the process manager synthesizes the internal and external factors that affect the action plan, and then finds solutions to redirect or adjust the action plan. The process manager must maintain internal communication and make quick decisions as needed.

Step 12: Evaluating and monitoring the advocacy campaign

When the advocacy campaign has come to an end, it is important to verify its impact on the policy outcomes. The entire campaign implementation process must also be evaluated. An organization learns from these practical exercises so the advocacy team will be better prepared to take action in future situations.

- Emphasize implementation achieved at each stage
- Send encouraging messages and congratulations to all the campaign's allies
- Send respectful messages to opponents, political factors, and policymakers
- Communicate the results achieved by the organization's members
- Post all the public documents that have resulted from the advocacy campaign (deposition documents, research, opinion papers, media coverage, and political communications) on the organization's website
- Maintain/update the contacts database with the contacts gained during the campaign

The political response

Once they are chosen, policymakers fight for a single purpose: their reelection. In consequence, they will pay attention to issues that concern a large constituency in order to represent that constituency and win its support in the future. A campaign must embody:

- Representation
- Legitimacy
- Credibility
- Unique message as a potential source of votes
- Realistic and long-term expectations
- Responsible involvement in public decisions

Civil society expects that policymakers are aware of the existence of an advocacy campaign; for the campaign to be effective, an organization/coalition and policymakers must share a certain set of democratic values:

- **Predictability:** policymakers must be aware of a campaign's intentions
- **Credibility:** policymakers must accept the transparency and seriousness of the approach and not misunderstand it as a gamble
- **Cooperation instead of conflict:** policymakers must accept the intention of civil society to cooperate instead of fight for attention
- **Reciprocity:** policymakers must show respect for civil society's causes, and should be aware of and respect the advantages presented to them:
 - free consultations from civil society experts
 - an efficient way to communicate with voters
 - a prepared legislative agenda
- **Approach/Persuasion:** policymakers must appreciate the validity of the advocacy campaign approach should understand why interest groups fight for the advocacy campaign goal.

Measuring efficiency

The following guidelines distinguish between an efficient and inefficient advocacy program.

- *Information*
 An efficient program...
 - regularly publishes accessible information about the issues
 An inefficient program...
 - publishes information irregularly or accessible only to experts

- *Legislative proposals*
 An efficient program...
 - develops legislative proposals and sends them to members in advance of legislative debate
 An inefficient program...
 - distributes incomplete text of a law or directs readers to another source for further information

- *Issue identification*
 An efficient program...
 - establishes its objective by taking into account the problems that directly affect the organization's members
 An inefficient program...
 - identifies broad issues, such as the national budget deficit, as being the most worrisome problem of the current year
 An efficient program...
 - anticipates problems that might appear in the future
 An inefficient program...
 - still has, in its 2002 agenda, the same problems as it had in 1990

- *Action*
 An efficient program...
 - takes action to influence the decision making process as it occurs and contributes to the creation of the framework for debate
 An inefficient program...
 - assesses laws only after they have already been adopted

- *Support network*
 An efficient program...
 - encourages the organization's members to get involved
 An inefficient program...
 - generates poor contacts with business and political circles

- *Credibility*
 An efficient program...
 - results in the organization being consulted by policymakers and invited to public debates
 An inefficient program...
 - does not result in consultations or invitations to public debates

Conclusions and Suggestions

Characteristics

In implementing the steps described above, an advocacy campaign should be mindful of the following basic principles:

- **Method:** The advocacy process is neutral from the political point of view, it is open for anyone to use.
- **Message:** Defining a proper message for a certain audience is the main instrument in the advocacy campaign.
- **Information:** Information represents power; its sources must be credible.
- **Cooperation:** The advocacy activity is a cooperative process; comprising groups and individuals have distinct and precise responsibilities.
- **Decision-making:** Though political systems are different in each country, they all have in common the elements pertaining to human nature in the decision-making process – the decision-makers, time, and information.
- **Involvement:** To take part in the decision-making process, a group must be constantly present. Even if a campaign is not successful in every legislative battle, policymakers and other political factors will be more aware of how their decisions affect their constituencies.
- **Art and science:** The advocacy process is both art (imagination, creativity) and science (communications, ability, and practice).
- **Success:** Even the most elaborate strategy can fail; both success and failure should be anticipated.
- **Synchronization:** Activities should be organized to make the best use of time and space; the message must be coherent and remain under the campaign's control, even if many different groups want to be involved in the process.
- **Participation:** Advocacy is one way to practice democracy. It is a way for civil society as a whole and for interest groups specifically to participate in democracy.

Additionally, advocacy demonstrates that:

- The democratic process has the power to change fundamentally the relations between policymakers and civil society represented by structured interest groups.
- The interests of all groups that comprise civil society are not the same. Effective advocacy identifies and elaborates a connection between different groups to create a coalition in support of solutions that benefit a majority of constituents.
- To unify these groups into a structured coalition, organizations must use a professional, proactive approach.

Communications

While different advocacy campaigns will have different strategies, good advocacy campaigns share some characteristics, particularly as related to communications. In the best advocacy campaigns, individuals' and organizations' relationships are cultivated long before the campaign begins. The ideal campaign generates substantial communication in the form of personal letters, phone calls, and visits to policymakers from voters – all things that show policymakers the future impact of some potential legislative measure. Campaigns can also offer well-documented information to policymakers. A spokesperson or “spokes-team” can effectively deliver specialized information regarding the impact of possible decisions. Articles, letters to the editor, and paid publicity also bring the campaign theme to public attention. All these forms of communication serve to generate public support and create a better understanding of the cause.

Advocacy campaigns are conducted via one or a combination of several channels, depending on the nature of the chosen theme:

- Legal channels in conformity with the legislative process
- Media involvement as a communication vehicle
- Face-to-face interactions with policymakers (direct advocacy)
- Mobilization of members and allies at the grassroots level

Starting an Advocacy Campaign for the First Time

Taking on a national-scale advocacy campaign may be intimidating the first time. To gain practical experience, groups may want to start by:

- Influencing a public decision at the local level
- Observing/monitoring the legislative process at the local level
- Cooperating with experienced organizations
- Using specialized expertise to increase visibility
- Using high levels of technical assistance for complex themes

Appendix 1

Essential Communications Questions

What is the purpose of the advocacy campaign?

A campaign should be designed for a long-, middle-, or short-term goal to implement a solution for a clearly established problem. If a campaign cannot clarify its purpose to itself, it will be impossible to explain the problem to journalists.

What is the message?

The right message is extremely important for each advocacy campaign. Those who succeed in creating a strong message can transform relations with the media – and be successful in advocacy. In most cases, the message is developed as a catchphrase. It can be tested by focus groups before its launch. For maximum impact, the message must appeal to the emotions, and symbols have a powerful appeal to cultural and social values. The message has to be strong and compact, and should be easily conveyed to the public and policymakers. Since television occupies a special role among information sources, the visual impact of a message must be carefully crafted.

Who is the audience?

Choosing the proper way for sending the message depends on the audience. The primary audience of an advocacy campaign is policymakers. If policymakers are well aware of the problem, they will be much more receptive and more interested in resolving it. While the use of the media as directed to policymakers is an essential step for a campaign's success, other media consumers should not be neglected; they are potential allies of the campaign.

How do we measure success?

Success is measured to some degree by the campaign's evaluation by the media. A proper evaluation of the campaign does assess its success or the failure, and at the same time offers information, laying the groundwork for future advocacy campaigns. Hence, it is impossible to know if an advocacy campaign was successful if procedures and measures for evaluation were not established before the campaign even started.

For example, in the press, one criterion of success is the location of an article in a publication, and the proximity of a campaign's catchphrase or declaration to the title's proximity. This visibility is an indicator of success, and will raise awareness of a campaign. If an article about the campaign is positioned on the first page, or is mentioned there, the campaign certainly succeeded in its use of the media. All these factors must be carefully monitored during the campaign. In television, success is also measured by visibility. A good image is the most important aspect for this visual media.

A campaign's opponents are also monitoring the media, so it is important to analyze their reactions to and their presence in media coverage as well. If opponents have the benefit of greater media coverage, then the campaign must be re-evaluated as there is a distinct possibility for failure.

Another way to evaluate media coverage is by the number of debates and reactions generated by the campaign. If these debates are expanded beyond the work of the campaign, success is likely to happen.

Appendix 2

Maintaining Media Access

1. Think through and adapt the message daily, but mold it for a longer period of time as well.
2. Think at the local, regional, and national levels – do not underestimate any media institution.
3. Evaluate specific media importance by using the appointed public message criteria.
4. Read, listen to, and watch the media – if you want be heard by journalists you must know them.
5. Do not neglect or underestimate the power of media coverage.

Appendix 3

Ten Steps for Sending a Message to the Media

1. Build media relationships; do not wait until you have a message to convey.
2. Make a database of journalists and include fields for their occupation and interests.
3. Make yourself heard by volunteering information to the press.
4. Use numbers, statistics, and studies to support and validate your message.
5. Choose a spokesperson to represent you.
6. Be consistent in your relations with the press, and have regular communication with them.
7. Voice and maintain your opinions each time the media is debating a theme relevant to your interest area.
8. Correct mistakes when they appear, but do so without offending the responsible journalist.
9. Show a proactive attitude by writing and recommending debate themes.
10. Be ready to give information each time journalists request more details concerning an issue. Every news story needs continuity.