

PLANNING FOR ACTION

With your goals, research and allies in place, the next step is to bring all this work together into an action plan. Action planning should be coupled with a detailed budget, and both might require revision as the programme develops and plans change. As you carry out activities, there will be internal. And external changes that affect the outcomes of your work. You should ensure your action plan is flexible enough to take changes as time goes on. Periodic reviews and reflection, built into your planning process, will help you to stop and assess whether you need to adjust your plans accordingly. Even if things are likely to change, you should still begin with a detailed action plan and budget which offers a starting point and framework from which to make those adjustments. Remember when planning, advocacy work can be slow and time consuming. You need to plan a long-term commitment and have a realistic view of timescales when doing your advocacy planning work.

Good planning is essential for effective advocacy work, so always consider the following:

- **Goals, objectives and strategies:** these long-term aims are in line with your overall vision.

They define in broad terms where you are, where you want to go and how you believe you can get there.

- **Advocacy projects or programmes:** these are medium-term planned periods of activity aimed at influencing and changing the policy environment and public opinion around a particular issue. Activities should achieve some of your overall advocacy strategy objectives. (Occasionally they are referred to as advocacy campaigns, but we have chosen to reserve the word ‘campaign’ for public campaigning, which is covered in the next section)

• **Tactics, actions or activities:** these are short-term specific activities within the larger change strategy, designed for a specific moment and opportunity, such as research, lobbying, public mobilization and media work. Their purpose is to shape a project and capture the attention of people in power, in relation to your issue.

• **Monitoring and evaluation:** this involves monitoring progress and evaluating your impact so you can change your strategy and activities as necessary, and learn for the future.

• **Participatory planning for citizen-centered advocacy:** participatory approaches to planning community action achieve your advocacy goals by making empowerment and active citizenship a practical reality

Quick and useful: How your plan might look

Action plans take various forms, but all should detail exactly what you plan to do, when it needs to happen, and who is responsible.

You might consider drawing up a table, like the following:

Objectiv	Targets	Activitie	Indicato	Timing	Responsibility	Review

- You should organize your plan in terms of its objectives; this will provide an overview of your advocacy project and what you need to deliver
- The indicators column is where you will record your intended outcomes; that will allow you to see when you have achieved successes
- Record in the review column the dates when you will review progress. It is at these dates where you might consider how your plan and budget need to be revised.

In addition to the overview, you will need a more detailed outline of what actions are needed, and when. You should also take account of certain external dates which your activities might need to tie in with, such as international conferences or consultation dates. Good advocacy is also about getting your message, or your report, or your representative to the right meeting or person at the right time. Don't forget to schedule monitoring and evaluation activities into this timeline. Another way to approach detailed planning is to do it by activity, rather than by timeline. This may be particularly useful if different colleagues or teams are responsible for different types of work. You will, of course, still need to build in account of timings and significant dates. The resulting activity plan might look something like this:

Broad area	Activity	When	Who
Lobbying	Letter to X with report Meeting with Y Leafleting at summit Deliver	date date date date	name name name (likely to be same person, team or organisation)
Public campaigning	Materials produced Letter writing Petition	date date date (nb ready for delivery - see	name name name
Media work	Media list ready Press release sent Report on website	date date date (nb needs to coincide with letter to X	name name name
Awareness raising	Posters Community	date date date	name name name

You may need to produce more detailed plans or a series of separate plans. A large event, such as a workshop, conference or press launch will also require a detailed plan of its own (for each of the various activities), alongside the main advocacy plan. You will need to ensure your detailed plans fit into the overview, so that everything is well coordinated.

Quick and useful: Planning checklist

The Save the Children Fund advocacy handbook suggests the first step after completing an action plan is to carry out a reality check. You need to assess whether your proposed plan is realistic and appropriate.

- Are you ready to implement your plan? Are you clear about your objectives? Do you have your evidence and solutions in place? Do you know your audience? Do you have good contacts among your influential? Do you know what activities you are going to carry out? Have you decided what advocacy style or approach you are going to use?
- What are you expecting from your partners/allies? Are you sure of their motives and goals? Do they enhance your credibility? What will happen if they drop out?
- What resources – financial, technical, and human – are available? What are the implications for your plan? Do you need to build in some training activities to your plan?
- How will you coordinate and monitor the different approaches you are using? Do you have a plan for integrating them and avoiding bottlenecks?
- Are there any risks? How will your activities affect the reputation of your organization? How might it affect your funding to do other activities? Might you

lose valuable staff? Could other current partners no longer wish to work with you? What can you do to mitigate any negative outcomes?

- What would you do if? What are your alternatives, contingency plans or fall-back positions? External conditions may change and you may have to rethink your plans build in flexibility so you are prepared for this.

PLANNING FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The final, but essential, step in good advocacy is to develop a separate but related action plan for monitoring and evaluation. Thinking about evaluation should be fundamental to all the planning stages, carried out alongside your planning, not as an afterthought.

- What do you want the outputs of each activity to be? For example, you have distributed X thousand leaflets, or the issue has received Y amount of media coverage, or X hundred members of the public took action and showed their support
- What outcomes do you intend these outputs to lead to? For example, the government is amending its policy on Z, or the local government has allocated X% of its budget
- These details will allow you to plan milestones, against which you can review your progress and later evaluate your success and overall impact

However, if you plan for evaluation before you begin, you will have a far better chance of reaching a meaningful assessment than if you wait until the project is underway or even over. This is a very complex area and it is often difficult to evaluate exactly what actions led to particular outcomes, or what the final impact was.

Advocacy actions

There is a variety of effective actions that your advocacy programme action plan will need to include. Employing different actions, at different levels, appropriate to the audience and decision-making level, is likely to be much more effective than using only one or two different advocacy methods in one way. This section offers you an introduction to some different advocacy tools that you can adapt to your own issue, and include appropriately in your own action plan.

Lobbying

Key idea: Lobbying

—Organizations like Water Aid are extremely important to Parliament. I obviously cannot be up-to-speed with every possible issue facing the UK and the wider world; organizations like Water Aid keep me up-to-date with these issues. They provide me with valuable information and briefings. (Caroline Spelman MP, UK Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, 2003).

Lobbying is usually defined as attempting to directly persuade decision-makers and influentials.

It can be both formal, through letter writing and scheduled meetings, or more informally at chance meetings, through leaflets or invitations to events etc. The cornerstone of lobbying is shaping the agenda of the meeting around a 'deliverable' for the decisionmaker. Not all lobbying expects to reach a conclusion or success immediately. Often, lobbying can be based around negotiation first, with longer term aims.

Preparing for a lobbying meeting

Preparing well for lobbying meetings is critical as it will help you to be clear about what you want to achieve, how to go about it during the meeting, and how best to follow up what was discussed and negotiated. The key issue is clearly identifying what the decision-maker can deliver and how this fits into your overall advocacy strategy/advocacy agenda!

With this in mind you should ensure that in your preparation for the lobbying meeting you:

- Research your lobbying targets, and get to know them. Use your analysis of your target's values, knowledge and experience to inform your tactics
- Clarify your goal: what outcome do you want? Will it solve the problem? Is it realistic? Have clear and concrete policy 'asks', informed by your analysis, evidence and proposed solutions
- Identify your policy 'wins', informed by information and intelligence about what is feasible, what will be opposed and what differences in positions are
- Contact like-minded organizations for potential collaboration and support. Alliances, particularly with influential groups or individuals, can strengthen a negotiating position
- Have persuasive case studies, statistics, facts and figures to hand. Information can be a powerful negotiating tool
- Make sure you and other spokespersons are well briefed on the issues lobby target – this will increase your confidence and your credibility
- Meet with the other NGOs beforehand if you are going to meetings with decisionmakers or influentials as part of an NGO delegation. This will enable you to discuss

the points you want to raise at the meeting, and allow you to cover the issues you want discussed at the meeting itself. Decide who will make the points from among your group; allocate roles including lead Spokesperson and note taker. Agree points amongst lobbyists, what responses to questions or styles are to be used

- Prepare a brief (one page) of lobby points, which can be left with the lobby target and serve as an aide memoir. Anticipate the counter arguments which the decision-maker may make and have your answers prepared.

During the lobbying meeting

Smaller numbers of people can lead to a more constructive, less defensive atmosphere.

Open the meeting by introducing everyone around the table. If you know that the decision-maker is hostile to your position, you might point out areas of common ground or mutual interest, and then proceed. Indicating willingness to compromise at the outset can be an effective way to create a friendly climate. This can help in identifying the true reasons for opposition to change. Present the most important points first, but then give the decision-maker time to talk and listen fully to what they have to say. While it is important to have minimum and maximum positions, it is not effective to put them out on the table initially. If a negotiator reveals the least they are willing to settle for, your lobby target will not be motivated to negotiate beyond that minimum. In terms of style, engagement is usually more effective than condemnation. It may sometimes be appropriate to be tough, it is seldom appropriate to be confrontational, especially if you intend to follow up the lobby meetings with further ones. Be clear on what you want the decision-maker to do (but be flexible) and gain firm commitment from them. If power holders or decision-makers have previously decided that they will not be

influenced to change their position, this may paralyze the process. You will need to understand each other's position, and provide more evidence to strengthen your position. Use consistent body language: keep your voice calm and regular, relax your shoulders, be conscious of what your demeanor and tone are indicating. Try not to let the discussion get off track; if it does, interrupt politely and bring the discussion back to the central issue. During the lobby meeting you need to very clearly identify and discuss the 'Policy ask' that the decision-maker is capable of delivering. This is the most important point. If a question comes up that you cannot answer, say you will get back to them, and always follow up such a promise. At the end of the meeting, thank the decision-maker for their time and re-state what you understand they have said they will do.

Quick and useful: Simulating negotiation skills

Try this simple simulation exercise, to develop the negotiation skills of those involved in your advocacy work. As well as a useful way of practicing negotiation skills, this exercise can also be used by an advocacy team to develop a real negotiating position on a particular issue.

Step 1: Divide participants into conflicting interest groups, such as community members, local private company representatives, local government, international donors, and international water supply companies. Give them a draft policy statement to analyze.

Step 2: In their interest groups, participants discuss the statement, debate their position and draw up a negotiating strategy, including their minimum and maximum positions

Step 3: The participants come back together and re-divide into groups made up of one representative of each viewpoint, and negotiate a final policy statement.

Step 4: Participants come back together again and discuss the following:

- What was the process involved in deciding a minimum and maximum position?
- What happened in the negotiating groups?
- Which interest group gained the most and why?

After the lobbying meeting

Follow up the meeting with a thank you letter to your lobby target, which also includes a summary of the points that were raised, refers to any agreements or disagreements that arose during the meeting, and outlines what the next steps are. Follow up on any action points that were agreed at the meeting, and share the information and details of what was discussed during the lobbying meeting with others/colleagues.

Follow through if your proposal is accepted. Suggest a drafting committee is established with a representative from your organization; offer your organization's services to assist the officer responsible for implementing change; if your formal offers are rejected, keep informal contact; follow through all procedural levels until policy change becomes a reality at all levels. Don't forget to thank everyone involved and state how you intend to go forward.

Project visits

You may find that arranging a visit to an effective project is a good way for lobbying to take place. Seeing a positive example of the proposition you are lobbying for can convince skeptical decision-makers, as well as giving the opportunity for community members themselves to speak on their own behalf. The downside is that project visits

can be expensive, require lots of planning and time. Commitment on behalf of participants – particularly the decision-makers, which they may not wish to commit.

Writing letters

Writing a letter can be another direct and formal lobbying tool as part of your advocacy.

Remember, though, that public figures receive many letters, so you will want to ensure writing is the most effective and appropriate way to get your message across.

Quick and useful: Tips for letter writing

- Be brief, no more than one or two pages, although documents or other materials can be attached
- Your tone should be firm but courteous, and you should feel comfortable with the letter being made public
- After a brief introductory paragraph, state clearly the purpose of the communication; try to mention something on which you agree with the recipient of the letter (establishing common ground)
- Correct your spelling and punctuation
- Make sure all signers receive a copy, send copies to other influential actors, remembering to keep a copy – as well as copies of any responses – for yourself