

Constituency building – continued

Constituency-building is an art, not a science. It is like painting a giant mural—each portion of the painting in itself can stand alone, but the collective force of its entirety is much more powerful. Constituency-building is the act of engaging groups of individuals to support a particular issue or particular organization. The larger the number of participants, and the more active and influential they are, the more effective your constituency will be. It is not necessary that all members of your constituency be involved to the same degree, nor is it necessary that all be drawn to your efforts for the same reasons. It must be broad-based enough to include all kinds of people—from parents to policemen—at the level of activism or support that best suits them. You also need to assure that the activities of your constituency are those that capture the attention of opinion leaders and policy makers. The debate on countless public policy issues will intensify as years pass. It will go on with or without us. Your challenge and your opportunity are to assure that you are an active and effective part of that debate. Building a broad-based, influential constituency willing to engage in support of your advocacy and other issues is the best way to begin

Building Constituencies at the Local and State Levels

There are a several approaches to constituency–building. You choose the one or several to best suit your purposes.

- System-focused approach:

Build a unified constituency of individuals, parents, providers, opinion-leaders, and decisionmakers who will advocate for the issue.

- Strategies with potentially powerful ripple effects:

Engage powerful allies -- organizations and lobbying initiatives.

Develop accountability and evaluation strategies to know the impact of what has been done in constituency building efforts and their outcomes.

- **Constructing messages:**

Develop messages, language, and "the business case" for each constituency. Develop tools, materials, and strategies specifically targeted for a variety of constituencies. Convene and train advocates. Remember that most people do not have time to be active participants in your group, but can make other contributions if they know about them. Communication is critical. You must go out routinely to give your constituency a sense that your group is active and that they are involved in both the issue and the outcome

The process of constituency building involves: Establishing the issues

Triangle Analysis: Mapping Legal-Political Solutions

This framework can be used for two main purposes.

- It can be used to analyze how a combination of policies, institutions, and social values and behavior contribute to or perpetuate a problem (issue).
- The framework can be used to map and clarify strategy options to address each of the three dimensions.

The triangle framework is based on the idea that law and policy affect people's status and rights because they:

- **regulate** work and social relations; and
- **Define** access to economic resources, opportunities and political power.

Laws and policies can be unjust in three ways:

- **Content:** The written law, policy, program or budget can be discriminatory, or contradict a basic right, perpetuate a violation. Sometimes people are not aware of the laws that govern their lives.

- **Structure:** Policies and laws may be not be enforced. Or, if they are, they may be enforced unfairly, favoring some groups of people and neglecting others. Policies may not take into account the laws as enacted. Access to the laws may be difficult or impossible for some people.

- **Culture:** If citizens are unaware of a policy or law or if social norms and behavior undermine their enforcement, or custom and tradition are enforced in communities (and be outside the law), then the law does not exist in practice. This is the case, for example, when poor people are unaware of their rights and lack the resources to pursue a legal solution.

Triangle analysis is useful because it highlights the specific aspects of the system that may need to be changed. In some cases, advocacy may need to focus on the content of the law or policy. In other instances, the content may be fine but the law or the policy is not enforced, hence the need to focus strategies on getting the legal or other government structures to implement the law.

However, whatever the analysis reveals, all strategies must target culture since social norms operate behind the scenes to define power relations and access. By addressing cultural dynamics, policy reform can have a real impact on people's lives.¹³

When you select an advocacy issue or goals for your organization, you need to identify where the change needs to occur – at the level of policy, at the implementation level, or in the culture and behavior of the people themselves? This is known as triangular analysis. Political solutions to problems often take more than just law or policy reform. There are many examples from different countries where laws were changed, while the people did not. Laws are a critical part of public policy because they regulate work and social relations, and access to economic resources,

opportunities and political power.

Questions to guide triangular analysis

- Is a new or improved law or policy needed?
- Is the existing policy or law being implemented or enforced adequately?
- Do people know the law and believe that they have rights in order to pursue solutions or make demands on the system?
- Is the culture or tradition in effect denying peoples' rights? When you have isolated the issues through analysis of the needs, you can better deal with the potential constituency.

So you need a plan to build a constituency

To build a constituency, a group needs to reach out to people and to try to engage them. It is important to identify which people you want to involve in your group. For example, if your group represents families of adults with serious mental illnesses, do you want to limit membership to family members or be more inclusive? If there are large numbers of potential beneficiaries (e.g. land reform for farmers) how do you manage such potentially large numbers?

- Bigger groups generally have more impact, but the more diverse the membership the less focused the message.

There's no right choice. It's your decision.

Your organization may use a number of ways in which to reach people:

- Through direct contact, meetings
- Through other NGOs, CDAs or organized or community groups
- Through mailings to relevant groups, and
- Through public education activities such as speeches, conferences, web sites and

written material. These are known as outreach efforts. These may encompass any or all of the following:

Posters

If illiteracy is an issue then visual media such as posters, comics or TV ads may be the best option.

Use of community/traditional leader

While community headers may not be part of your constituency their influence in being aware of the issues and being able to state the facts, can be an asset in communication.

Newsletters

A newsletter can be a important line of communications to your members. The newsletter tells members what the organization has done and is planning, and why the issues you promote are important. Newsletters can inform members about the communities assigned to particular issues, and persons to contact for a given project. These can be delivered in hard copy, by email or fax.

Leaflets

A leaflet or flyer is usually one sheet of paper printed on one side. It is produced quickly to get information out to members or appeal to the broader community. The main purposes of leaflets are to inform people and get them to act. Leaflets should immediately attract the readers' eye, and get the point across simply. In essence, they are a miniature poster therefore they should

be brief, eye catching and use headlines, graphic illustrations, big print and standard size paper. People should be able to scan the message as they pause by a wall or notice board.

Website

If your organization has a web site and people are familiar with it and have access to an online computer then this is an effective way of communication though if a number of your constituents are unable to access online then another form of communication may be required in addition.

Fact Sheets

A fact sheet contains more information and is designed for audiences who need to know more about your organization or an issue. A fact sheet can be expected to have a somewhat longer practical life than the typical leaflet.

Brochures.

Brochures are multiple page publications. Be sure the purpose and useful life of a brochure really justify the cost and effort. Brochures make good handouts when you want to make an especially good impression – as in speaking to an influential community group, or when you have an issue that requires thorough treatment.

Surveys

The very act of a survey being undertaken and where an explanation is required can be a force to communicate to the potential constituency the goals and aims of the organization or potential campaign.

Working groups

This can be an informal set of people, organizations, companies, trade associations, other advocates, academics with a common interest in the specific issue (or campaign or organization) which meets regularly to share information and discuss strategies to achieve common goals. A working group will:

- Focus on a specific issues or related issues
- It meets regularly so members can share information related to the common purpose, and
- Does not take joint action

Coalitions.

Coalitions are more formal than networks and working groups. A coalition is a group of organizations explicitly working together:

- Work is coordinated towards a specific common objective
- Has a formal structure
- Communicates regular to ensure that joint actions are supported by the coalition; and
- Does not take joint action.

Have drawbacks

- need organizational agreement to participate and take decisions
- need compromise to reach consensus
- You do not represent your organization viewpoint but that of the coalition agenda.

Issues and Problems

Structural innovations important for NGO activities that stretch across international borders e.g. lobbying – can be caught by

- Conflicts of interest and need for a profile, and
- Friction over who speaks for whom and on what basis.

Example Northern NGOs go to forums/conferences and speak on —behalf of others and Southern NGOs —speak for communities who may be unaware of the campaign and unsure of the benefits. So to avoid complications and problems you need to ensure:

Legitimacy: who speaks for whom and how differences of opinion are resolved where individual participants vary in strength and resources.

- **Accountability:** who enjoys the benefits and suffers the costs of what alliance achieves, especially at the grassroots.

- **Structure:** how to deal with the challenges of genuinely international governance, decision making and communication

- **Strategy:** the need to develop more rigorous arguments and more credible alternatives as a contribution to policy debates.

People will become involved in an advocacy campaign when they:

- Are aware of the problem
- Oppose current conditions and policies
- Are convinced your group offers viable alternatives and
- Are presented with concrete ways to become actively involved.

Your greatest ally is a committed constituent. Consider ways in which you can draw your constituents deeper into the issue by providing educational materials, and by suggesting ways

they can contribute and be active in your NGO or any campaign. It is also useful to contact constituents through print and broadcast media, especially local radio stations, and through circulation of written materials or posters prepared by your campaign. The approach should be adapted to financial means. Heavy reliance in production of printed materials may prove unduly expensive for local grassroots organizations.

Balancing unity and diversity is demanding. You can avoid problems by examining whether potentially troublesome matters will be addressed. Consider:

- Goal differences.
- Ideological differences.
- Different expectations on results of actions or efforts.
- Power differences within the coalition.
- Differences of commitment and intensity to constituency objectives.
- Dealing with differences in financial and in-kind commitments.
- Differences in organizational style among different sized groups

Identify people or organizations with mutual interests.

- Raise awareness among community members of your organizations goals or your campaign.
- Meet with a number of them individually before you convene the first meeting of a group.
- Apply the best outreach techniques for reaching across different groups.
- Negotiate issues regarding goals and leadership roles before the first meeting.
- Convene an exploratory or planning meeting. At this meeting you should:
 - Identify mutual interests
 - Begin to develop shared positions
 - Begin to develop an agreeable structure on roles and support

- Develop an action plan
- Tailor message suited to different audiences
- Tap into existing networks and coalitions.
- Follow up on the action plan.
- Convene subsequent meetings consistent with the action plan. But do not have meetings before the actions agreed to at the prior meeting have been undertaken.
- Meet after actions and assess and re-assess directions and goals.

The importance of participation in advocacy

There are many reasons why participation is critical for effective advocacy. Advocacy strategy planning is an opportunity for learning and decision-making amongst community stakeholders.

Many initiatives claim to be participatory because they consult people while real decisions about strategy, plans and directions are made elsewhere – normally higher up in the organization.

True participation, i.e. involving a community in making important and strategic decisions, is key to empowerment and creates ownership of the initiative, generating commitment and creating shared ideals. Participation can also help to speed up advocacy and cope with conflicts and differences. Most importantly, it builds agency at the community-level and thus helps to shift the power dynamics in the long-term. Participation in advocacy, in addition, provides new

Community experiences and builds long term skills in areas such as:

- Analyzing problems and solving them collectively
- Setting objectives
- Preparing budgets

- Leading meetings and speaking in public
- Organizing campaigns