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Advocacy – A Recipe for Success

By Lori A. Hoffner

ad•vo•ca•cy

noun \ˈad-və-kə-sē\

: the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: the act or process of advocating something
Merriam Webster Dictionary

Stop Throwing Spaghetti at the Wall: How to Build an Advocacy Strategy That Sticks

One of my favorite scenes from the classic film *The Big Chill* takes place in the kitchen. A group of friends is cooking spaghetti, and one of them tosses noodles at the wall to see if they're done. His friends laugh and ask, "You still cook it like that?" He smiles and replies, "That's how you know it's ready—when it sticks."

That may be a fun way to test spaghetti, but when it comes to advocacy, throwing ideas at the wall and hoping something sticks is no recipe for success.

Successful advocacy is intentional, strategic, and built on a foundation of relationships, clarity, and purpose. It's not about hoping for the best—it's about planning for real impact.

Why Advocacy Requires More Than Good Intentions

Throughout my career—as a nonprofit director, board member, and elected official—I've seen how critical advocacy is in driving real change. Whether securing funding, passing a mill levy, or building community support for programs, well-prepared advocates make the difference.

But effective advocacy doesn't happen by chance. It requires structure, shared responsibility, and a clear plan. You wouldn't run a program without a strategic framework—your advocacy work should be no different.

The Recipe for Meaningful Advocacy

Think of a strong advocacy campaign like your favorite recipe—it needs the right ingredients and intentional preparation. Here are the five essential elements every organization should include:

1. Passion: The Spark That Ignites Action

Passion is what motivates people to show up, speak out, and rally support. Invite individuals who care deeply about your cause. These are the people who vote, attend meetings, and influence others.

But passion must be harnessed productively. That means engaging in real relationships with your advocates—listening to their ideas, respecting their opinions, and helping them channel that energy into meaningful outcomes. Passionate voices often bring strong opinions, but with collaboration and mutual respect, they can drive positive change.



Pro Tip: Don't avoid the loudest voices. Engage them. Listen. When people feel heard, they're more likely to become loyal partners in your work.

2. Objective: A Clear Roadmap

You've gathered community feedback through surveys and forums—now what? It's your responsibility as an organization to take those ideas and develop a clear, focused objective.

That objective becomes your advocates' roadmap. It answers the essential questions:

- What are we working toward?
- Why does it matter?
- How will we get there?

Without a clear objective, advocacy efforts lose direction and passion can quickly spiral into confusion or division.

3. Perseverance: Sticking With It

Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. If you want your team to stick with the work, you need to define:

- The duration of the campaign

- Who's taking the lead
- How advocates will stay connected

While your organization can guide the timeline and structure, empower your advocates to own the process of engagement and accountability. Better yet, build a consistent core of advocates who remain involved beyond the scope of any single campaign.

Remember: Advocacy works best when people feel invested from beginning to end—and know their contributions matter.

4. Modesty: Keep the Focus on the Mission

Advocacy isn't about personal agendas or self-promotion. It's about supporting the cause, the organization, and the community.

Make it clear from the start: This work is not about the individual advocate—it's about collective action. Encourage your advocacy team to hold each other accountable and keep the spotlight where it belongs: on the mission.

5. Details: Use the Facts

Facts build credibility. Misinformation—even if unintentional—can derail your campaign and damage public trust.

To avoid that, your organization must provide advocates with:

- Clear, consistent talking points
- Anticipated opposition responses
- Updated fact sheets and FAQs
- A system for two-way communication

By equipping your advocates with accurate, real-time information, you ensure the message stays on point—and your organization remains trustworthy.

The Power of Your Story

At the heart of every successful advocacy effort is a compelling story.

Your story is your strongest tool.

It turns data into emotion, numbers into names, and facts into impact. Stories humanize your



work and connect with people on a deeper level. They help community members, voters, and funders understand not just *what* you do—but *why it matters*.

Encourage your advocates to share their personal connections to your mission. Spotlight the lives changed by your programs. Use narrative to show how your organization is building a healthier, stronger, more connected community.

Real change happens when people stop seeing your work as an abstract idea and start seeing themselves in your story.

Bring Stakeholders to the Table

No advocacy effort succeeds in isolation. Build alliances with key community stakeholders—local officials, business leaders, volunteers, and civic groups. Their support lends credibility, broadens your reach, and strengthens your position.

When stakeholders feel included from the beginning, they become champions for your cause. Their voices amplify yours. Their networks expand your message.

Don't Forget to Say Thank You

Your advocates are giving their time, energy, and heart to support your cause. Show them they're appreciated.

Gratitude doesn't have to be expensive—just intentional.

- Recognize them at events
- Highlight their contributions in your newsletter or on social media
- Offer small tokens of thanks like a facility pass, a handwritten note, or a spotlight feature

Appreciation builds loyalty. Loyalty builds sustainability.

Even if the campaign outcome isn't what you hoped for, celebrate what *was* accomplished. Every step forward—every conversation, every new connection—adds value to your mission.

Final Thoughts: Be Purposeful, Not Passive

As Henry David Thoreau wisely wrote:

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them.”

Advocacy is the foundation that supports your vision. It’s not a guessing game or a side project. It’s a critical piece of your organizational success.

So stop throwing spaghetti at the wall. Build your strategy with purpose.

Invite passionate voices, share a compelling story, engage key stakeholders, and lead with clarity.

When done right, advocacy doesn’t just make noise—it makes change.



Want more tools to build your advocacy strategy?

Download our [Advocacy Planning Checklist](#)

Let’s build something that sticks—and makes a difference.

Lori A. Hoffner, Organizational Development Speaker & Trainer, draws on years of experience of leadership in both the for-profit and non-profit business world. She can offer staff-development programs that help promotes a cohesive internal team and positive culture of support within your organization that helps benefit your bottom line.

To learn more about creating a positive culture in your workplace, and learn more about the staff training courses that Lori can offer, visit www.SupportingCommUnity.com or contact Jen Kayser, Sales and Marketing Coordinator at JenKayser@SupportingCommUnity.com.