

In the Beginning There Was a Good Idea...

THE BASICS

Get Your Priorities Straight

Your organization is eager to jump in and start changing things for the better, but before you even begin, take the time to picture the road ahead of you. Narrow down the problem you want to solve and its possible solutions. Identify potential champions and allies for those solutions and assess your internal capacity to make things happen.

The next few exercises will help you to conceptualize all of this more clearly. Especially when you have limited resources and staff, laying the groundwork before you plunge in will save you a lot of grief in the end.

It is critical to the success of your campaign to have a clear, overall picture of:

- What needs to be fixed,
- How it can be fixed,
- How important this issue is to your organization, and
- What will it take for you to accomplish your goal.

 Go to Appendix II, p. 6 for a worksheet to go through for each problem.

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What's the Problem?

One of the most challenging decisions to make is which of the many problems you see actually presents a solution that is both winnable and effective:

Potential Issue in 25 words or less – What needs to be fixed/stopped/created/improved:

Free children stuck in foster care by amending parental termination language to allow mothers to permit children to be placed in a home of a different religion.

How Many Ways Can It Be Fixed? (Or, Lots of Ways to Skin a Cat)

The first thing to remember while you're filling out the following is that you're not going to be able to answer this question right away.

We can fix/stop/create/improve _____ by mounting a campaign to

(the issue)

push for, request, demand, win :

1. An Administrative decision. _____ must be persuaded to

(who)

(do what)

2. A Budget appropriation increase/earmark. The FY ___ Budget must be amended by

increasing/inserting/adding _____
(what)

by/into/to _____
(certain line item or outside section)

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How Important is It?

Before you say, "very important, of course!" remember that you are working with a group of people that may have identified several problems that can only be changed in the administrative or legislative branches. Assessing the problems by using the following charts will encourage you to think strategically about them, understand which issue already has supporters that know and care about it, and brainstorm about any potential allies who may have a self-interest in the issue or share your mission.

Assign Priority Level

✓

Imperative to Our Mission	✓
Important to Our Mission	
Nice to Do	

Timeframe of Accomplishment

✓

Short-Term (12 months – 2 years)	✓
Long-Term (3 years – 5 years)	

Identify INTERNAL Time and Resources

Number of:	Needed	Available	Days per Week
Staff	1	No	2
Volunteers (regional)	15	15	1
Other (members)	300	300	1 day/month

Identify EXTERNAL Resources that are Needed and Available

List statewide and/or local supporters (e.g., allied organizations) with modest to good ability to influence public policy in order of importance.

Would like to have on our side	Are able to work with us
<i>Catholic Charities</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>State Dept. Public Welfare</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Mass Adoption Resource Exchange</i>	<i>Yes</i>

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<i>Council of Churches</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Jewish Family and Children Services</i>	<i>Yes</i>

 You can find blank priority-setting tools and charts in Appendix II, pp. 6-7.

Identify potential PUBLIC POLICY HEROES

List supporters and possible supporters in the administration and legislature and make an informed guess at their level of commitment to your policy issue.

Name	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Very committed (top 10 issues)	Very Supportive (top 25 issues)	Supportive (top 100 issues)	Don't care but willing to consider	Have some problems, but will consider
<i>Rep. Bob B.</i>		✓			
<i>Sen. Bill B.</i>		✓			
<i>Elton H. (Gov's office)</i>	✓				
<i>Sen. Will B. (Chair of Senate Judiciary)</i>				✓	
<i>Chair of House Judiciary</i>				✓	
<i>Rep. Felix P. (adoptive parent)</i>	✓				
<i>Speaker David B.</i>				✓	
<i>Sen. Pres. Kevin H.</i>				✓	

 You can find a blank Public Policy Heroes form in Appendix II, p. 8.

Now you're at the point where you're working with your own organizational planning committee to narrow in on your policy priority. The planning group may be made up of other staff members, board members, and volunteers for your organization – all people dedicated and eager to jump into a campaign. You have to manage the priority-setting process so that people can decide which solution is: 1) the most important one for your organization; 2) which is the most effective; and 3)

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which is winnable because you either have an existing network of supporters or an existing group of policymakers championing the issue.

Often principled organizations have a hard time ignoring a visionary solution that insiders say doesn't have a chance. Sometimes you just have to do it. People learn through experience to approach a visionary solution in incremental steps.

After honing in on the exact issue and solution and making a realistic assessment about your operations, you can take the next step – the real nitty-gritty.

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THE PEOPLE: Lists, Lists and More Lists

Your first job in a public policy campaign is to identify the individual policymakers that have the *authority* to change the targeted policy or program. Start by collecting an up-to-date list of all the managers in the administration and all the elected members of the legislature, focusing particularly on the people you identified as potential policy heroes.

You can find the names and contact information, and sometimes pictures, for high-level managers in the administration from the governor's office or the state website. (A list of website resources can be found in Appendix III). The names of the appropriate lower-level managers with authority can be found by asking the front desk folks. Start at the governor's office and work your way down to the secretariat level, the commissioner level, the program manager level and the line worker level.

The list of names, contact information and even pictures of legislators, can be found at the state capital in the clerk's offices and on the same state website. You will find that most of the legislative lists indicate which members are in top leadership: Speaker, President, Majority Leader, Minority Leader, Committee Chairs and so on, and which are so-called rank and file members. Make a special note of the Committees that will deal with your issue.

Your second job is to start figuring out or confirming where each key public policymaker stands on your issue. *This is very valuable information that should be kept within the campaign or shared with trusted friends.* NOTHING makes a public official madder than the public distribution of their position on a controversial issue before they have announced it themselves.

The only way to gather this valuable information is to start asking again. Just do it! Go to the state capital and start with the nice people you already know at the front desks. Ask any supportive person you've been working with in the administration – the lower-ranking the better because they'll tell you more. Ask the policymakers themselves. Ask the staff in key committees. Ask the staff in the clerk's office. Ask your own representative and senator. Ask members of the state capital press corps. Invite a friendly professional lobbyist to tell you war stories about the good old days.

Your job is to *just keep asking* till you fill out the charts like the ones on the following pages.

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You can find blank charts for the administration and legislature in Appendix II, pp. 9 and 10.

Names in...	Contact Information (including personal staff)	Notes clarifying position on the issue
Governor's Office	<i>617-727-3600; Elton H.</i>	<i>Adoptive Parent; Adoptive Parent member JSA</i>
Budget Office		
Commissioner of the Department of Public Welfare	<i>Commissioner Joe F.</i>	<i>In favor because of budget implications</i>
Manager, Division of Child Guardianship	<i>Rita W.</i>	<i>Head of adoption unit and child welfare worker; favors move</i>

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Finding Potential Policy Partners

As you move around the state capital asking about everybody's position on your issue, you will begin to collect stories about another set of powerful players. Sometimes they are called special interest groups; sometimes, stakeholders; and sometimes single-issue ideologues.

Whatever they are called, your next job is to identify any that might have an interest in or history of supporting or opposing a particular solution to your policy problem. Try to make a preliminary assessment, if you can, of how "influential" each group is considered to be in the capital. Fill out the chart below on each stakeholder from secondhand information for now. Follow up ONLY with the groups most likely to support you. They are your potential partners and you may be formally inviting some of them to join your campaign.

 You can find a blank Potential Organizational Partners chart in Appendix II, p. 11.

Potential Organizational Partners		
Organization Contact Information	History in Support	Notes: Influence and Contacts in Administration and Legislature
<i>Gene M., Catholic charities</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Very strong w/ Speaker and Sen. Pres</i>
<i>State Dept. Public Welfare</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Influential w/ public welfare committee</i>
<i>Jewish Family and Children's Services</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Influential w/ public welfare committee and asst. republican leader</i>
<i>Statewide Interfaith Organization</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Community leader with the ear of many rank and file lawmakers; Board President is college friend of Governor.</i>

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As you complete this chart and identify policy partners, don't just discard the list of stakeholders who don't support your issue. Keep a list of these groups or individuals too. Knowing your opposition and their influence can help you see and plan for potential obstacles ahead of time. Use the chart below to identify the groups who may pose conflicting views to your policy solution.

 You can find a blank Potential Organizational Opposition chart in Appendix II, p. 12.

Potential Organizational Opposition		
Organization Contact Information	History in Opposition	Notes: Influence and Contacts in Administration and Legislature
<i>Archdiocese</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Very strong leadership</i> <i>Capable of raising problems</i>
<i>Msr. B., Catholic Charities</i>	<i>Strong</i>	

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The Timing: Charting the Policymaking Schedule

While the governor is generally free to make administrative changes in programs or policies at almost any time, he or she may still be obligated by law to do some things, like submit the budget at a certain time. The legislature's policymaking schedule is usually very exacting in order to comply with the constitution, state law and their own rules determining everything from when and how to swear in new members to what hour the daily session must begin and end.

You will find the usual "How a Bill Becomes Law" and budget charts in the state capital in the secretary of state's office or the clerks' offices and on most state websites. Since these charts are handed out to every touring school child they are usually well-written and easy to understand. Get enough to hand out at your grassroots trainings.

Completing the policymaking schedule will help you chart some important dates, timelines and deadlines to incorporate into your campaign plan.

Policymaking Schedule		
Legislation	Date/Timetable/Deadline	Notes/Exceptions
New	<i>First Wed in December</i>	<i>Open in clerk's office for co-sponsors for 14 days</i>
Late Filed	<i>Any time</i>	<i>Need leadership agreement of 4/5 of membership voting YES</i>
Hearings	<i>Biennium starts in Jan. Year One; ends in July Year two</i>	<i>Committees schedule hearings by topic. Mon-Thurs. sponsors may request schedule changes</i>

 You can find a blank Policymaking Schedule in Appendix II, p. 13.

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The Budget Timetable

While the budget is just another bill, there are always different rules and timetables and even different kinds of budgets. Some states do an annual budget for each fiscal year; some states do a two-year budget bill in the first year of a two-year session and a “budget corrections” bill during the second year. Every state has different rules and different definitions for “deficiency” and “supplemental” budgets. Because part of your policy solution will probably require adding or transferring funds to a particular account or changing some language in a particular line item, your job for now is just to find out the rules and timetables for each different budget process in your state.

The chart below is filled out for bicameral legislative bodies with a lower and upper body – usually called the House and the Senate. (Nebraska does budgets with only one legislative body.)

 You can find a blank Budget Timetable in Appendix II, p. 14.

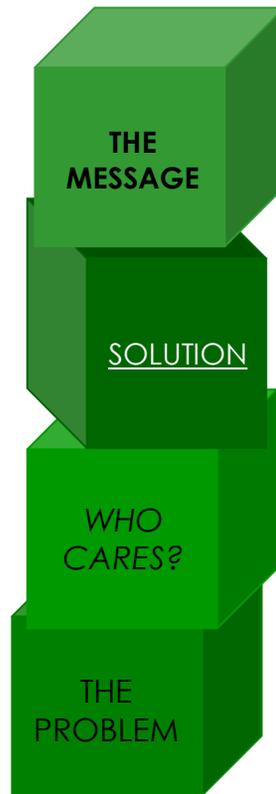
Budget Timetable		
Fiscal Year Budget	Date/Timeline	Notes/Exceptions
Government begins drafting budget <i>Agencies Secretaries A & F Gov</i>	<i>Aug Sept – Oct Nov – Dec Dec – Jan</i>	<i>Guidelines go out to agencies from Administration & Finance in Aug; hearing Nov. pro-forma</i>
Government submits annual budget	<i>3rd Wed in Jan</i>	<i>Constitutional – newly elected Gov has until Feb.</i>

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<p>House Budget Committee deliberations <i>Receive budget</i> <i>Review</i> <i>Floor debate</i></p>	<p><i>Jan</i> <i>Jan - March</i> <i>April - May</i></p>	<p><i>Once bill is released, floor debate 7 days later; floor debate takes 5-10 days</i></p>
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THE MESSAGE

Developing the Message



At this point, you have laid the foundation for developing your message. You've narrowed in on the problem that needs solving and understand what it will take to accomplish this mission. You've also successfully charted lists of people who:

1. Know the problem, but are looking for a solution,
2. Know the problem but supported alternative solutions,
3. Were happy with the status quo, and
4. Didn't know there was a problem in the first place.

The more you know the history of these various debates, the easier it will be to engage people in your issue, talk about your policy solution and respond to previous opposition. As a result, you'll be that much closer to

finding the most achievable policy solution for your issue and *developing the message* for your campaign.

THE MESSAGE

Your Goal is to be able to articulate a message promoting your “good policy idea” as a proven and tested model providing a solution to a pressing public problem.

Step 1 – You should be able to describe the human impact and economic impact of problem. The human impact is best demonstrated by personal testimonies of affected constituents who can illustrate and illuminate any well-researched documentation of a critical mass of suffering throughout the state. The collected stories and documentation should be published and distributed to public policymakers, the media and to community opinion leaders. The economic impact is best demonstrated by documenting cost savings and other efficiencies to the taxpayer through a series of fact sheets and reports.

Step 2 – You should be able to pass the ‘laugh test’ when you describe your problem’s solution as a hero opportunity to key players and potential policy partners in the administration, the legislature and among special interest group allies. Test your idea for a policy solution on friends, family or colleagues...if you can peak their interest without a giggle, you’re headed in the right direction. Of all the groups you will reach out to, the special interest groups may be the hardest to gauge in their support. Start the easy way with the list of traditional, directly-related provider trade organizations and consumer advocacy organizations involved in influencing public policy and then move on to include nontraditional, indirectly-related opinion leaders like faith-based or business organizations.

Polling:

Weighing the opinion of the general public on some key concepts related to your issue and policy campaign is the equivalent of passing the laugh test on a larger scale. While stakeholders and special interest groups hold a lot of power, public opinion favoring your side of the issue can help you frame your message to policy partners and decision makers.

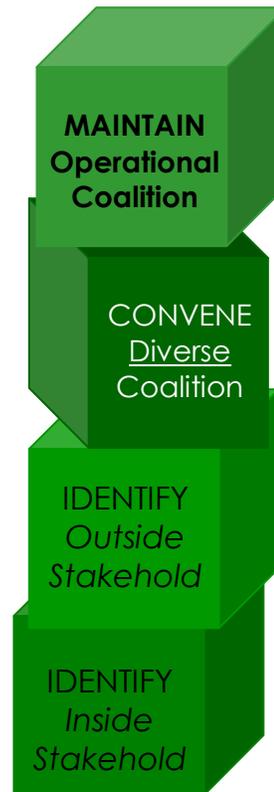
As you build your policy campaign, you should be thinking about raising money to hire a consultant to do some public opinion polling on your issue. Campaigns short of cash can frequently find a friendly, well-

THE MESSAGE

financed organizational ally who is doing a poll and negotiate adding a question or two.

THE STRATEGY

Finding Policy Partners



The next piece of your strategy is to identify potential partners who can help you convene a broad, consumer-led coalition that represents self-interested and mission-driven organizations.

For both of the first steps, refer back to the initial stakeholder charts you filled out earlier in your planning stages. Inside stakeholders are the policymakers, or potential public policy heroes. Outside stakeholders are public interest groups, many of which are probably engaged in mission-driven work just like your organization. Follow up to any initial contact you've had with these groups and policymakers and continue to gauge their interest and level of commitment to solving the problem you've

identified with a public policy campaign. Don't let any of your early brainstorming ideas slip through the cracks of busy campaign planning!

THE STRATEGY

Your Goal is to identify and recruit policy partners from the public and private sectors into an operational coalition in support of your policy solution.

Step 1 – You should be able to identify stakeholders outside the public policy arena and assess the potential of winning their support for (or opposition to) your policy solution. Start by making a list of all so-called special interest groups, professional associations and consumer advocacy and provider organizations. Using your personal connections and common sense, consult with your statewide colleagues in professional, trade or advocacy organizations and with any contacts in the administration and the legislature. Explain your policy problem and ask them to nominate potential policy partners among the special interest groups. Look for experience with policy campaigns, a capacity to mobilize their own members into district-based activities and a willingness to work in power-sharing coalitions.

Step 2 – You should be able to identify key players inside the administration and the legislature with an official role in deciding on the policy solution. In cooperation with potential special group policy partners, begin to build a contact list of key appointed officials in the administrators (line staff, supervisors, and managers) who are directly involved in the particular policy or program needing attention. Approach them, offering support to help improve their program and to gather information and data that will help refine your proposed policy solution. Recruit them as *inside advocates*.

The next step, which we'll talk more about in the next chapter, will be to reach out to these stakeholders more formally to ask them to participate in your operational coalition.

A Special Note on Inside Advocates (excerpted from *Real Clout*)

Inside advocates are precious creatures that can help you spot opportunities to display your expertise and exercise real power....[They] are public policymakers who deliberately, systematically, and sympathetically reach out to constituencies, consumers, and activists to gather all available information before they help make a public policy decision.

- They do it *deliberately* because they know that good public policy is influenced by facts.
- They do it *systematically* because they want to get all the facts from all affected constituencies.
- They do it *sympathetically* because they know they must go that extra mile for the activists and constituencies who lack the ability to monitor and influence pending public policy decisions in government.

Many high-level officials assign someone on their staff to be the inside advocate. This job consists of listing all the people and organizations that have a vested interest in the agency's operations, all bona fide experts in the field, and all people who are regularly

THE STRATEGY

Building a Budget

You will need resources to develop your internal capacity to proceed to the next set of pre-campaign activities. This is the time for you to figure out how to build a compelling case that will help you raise money for the development phase of your campaign.

Now is the perfect opportunity to spend some time putting together a four-page proposal outlining your policy change campaign as a winning strategy to solve a pressing public problem led by a coalition of powerful policy partners. This kind of a campaign snapshot will be useful when talking to potential funders and in-kind donors about your campaign.

After the “homework” from this chapter, you should be able to be specific about the budget you will need to:

- Designate skilled staff, along with resources needed, for start-up campaign activities, including polling, policy research, and grass-roots building activities.
- Recruit enough powerful allies into a power-sharing coalition and “staff out” a coalition building and maintenance process.
- Mobilize powerful policymakers who are willing to become your champions and make your policy campaign one of their top priorities.

A small three-month “development budget” should support at least two part-time staff – one to be designated as campaign manager to build the coalitions and the other to act as policy analyst to develop the potential solutions. Include overhead, a small- to medium-sized public opinion poll, and an experienced legislative strategy consultant to test the message with the public and the key players in the policy arena.

You may also want to consider budgeting for a media consultant to help make sure your campaign message is consistently reaching the public and the right policymakers.

Targets for fundraising are members of your coalition, individual big donors and of course, foundations. Even the most cautious foundations can and will fund the strategic development of a campaign to promote positive policy change. No lobbying will occur here!

THE STRATEGY

Campaign Budget Worksheet	
Item	Budget
<i>Campaign Manager (0.5 FTE)</i>	<i>15,000</i>
<i>Policy Analyst (0.5 FTE)</i>	<i>10,000</i>
<i>Overhead – rent, computers</i>	<i>2,000 (in-kind)</i>
<i>Printing, postage, phone</i>	<i>3,000 (fact sheets, brochure, etc.)</i>
<i>Polling three questions on University monthly poll</i>	<i>3,000</i>
<i>Legislative Strategy Consultant</i>	<i>5,000</i>

 You can find a blank Campaign Budget Worksheet in Appendix II, p. 15.

TOUGH QUESTIONS AND EASY ANSWERS

On Non-Profit Lobbying

Q: I know 501(c)3 organizations like our health center can participate in lobbying activities to support funding for new programs and fight Medicaid cutbacks by testifying at the state house and city hall, participating in rallies, organizing our clients and staff to write letters and make calls as long as we are careful. We keep records verifying that we are spending less than 5% of our budget and that we are not using federal funds or any of the foundation money that forbids lobbying. We have not hired a lobbyist or any consultant. Still our secretary of state is telling us we have to register as a "legislative and administrative agent" like the paid lobbyists for big business. Doesn't sound right!

A: *It doesn't sound right to many advocates that some foundations forbid the use of their money to lobby either, but we all know they have perfectly good reasons for that internal policy, and we have all found ways to live with it. Every state has a policy, through law or regulation, that may very well define you as the dreaded "special interest lobbyist" that gets paid to do it. And it doesn't matter if you worked for big business or a homeless shelter. Let me speak to another point you mentioned and suggest you talk to your board about your 501(c)3 organization filing to elect the 501(h) expenditure test which would allow you to spend more than 5 percent of your budget on lobbying activities. It's not as complicated as you might think. Finally, Appendix III in the back of the book will refer you to some wonderful materials from the Alliance for Justice showing you how to construct a budget that segregates federal and foundation money far away from any restricted lobbying activities.*

On Working with Nontraditional Partners

Q: Our disabled persons' advocacy group has been asked to join a coalition that's being backed by the nursing home industry to create a career ladder and increase the salaries of nursing home workers. We've been working with the unions to pass a minimum staffing standard for years and the nursing homes have been fighting us. Why are they asking us to join them in their campaign instead of joining ours? Why haven't they asked the unions to join too?

A: *For one thing the minimum staffing standard is already "polarized" with every one already on record for or against. However, in some states there have been coalitions of nursing home patient advocacy groups, nursing*

home providers and unions in the middle of organizing drives who have worked together to win raises and career ladders for nursing aides because they have each defined the issue in their own self-interest. And they've won raises for nursing homes and career ladders in large measure because the policymakers were enormously impressed when they met with a powerful set of advocates representing different interests who were usually fighting with each other. And yes it is possible for special interests to work together on one issue and against each other on another. It happens in politics all the time.

TOUGH QUESTIONS AND EASY ANSWERS

On Communications and the Media

Q: We are a very small 3 ½ person advocacy group for a specific disease that is increasingly in the news because the speaker's wife has just been diagnosed with it. What are some suggestions for using this opening to promote our current public education campaign about the need for an early screening program without exploiting and offending her or her husband?

A: *First try to identify a personal friend or neighbor who can give you some advice about how to approach her about playing an appropriate role in your public education campaign. If you hear that she is really a very private person and is not ready to become a poster child for your organization right now, leave her alone. If you hear she is at least comfortable with talking with you, then proceed very carefully and be prepared for her to be unwilling to personally lobby her husband for your program.*