Chapter

2

Blue Pages

Strategic Thinking: Pre-Campaign Activities

THE BASICS

Organizing the Campaign

One of the most important components of a successful policy campaign is an effective convening committee for your operational coalition. The convening committee is the true visionary behind your campaign. Start by identifying two or three organizations that have the most to gain or lose from your public policy solution.

THE BASICS

Once this group is on board with your policy goal and has committed to being part of the coalition foundation, set them to work creating an outline for coalition operations and campaign activities.

Use an Operations Planning Tool to help your convening committee plan what's on the horizon and to set key startup deadlines for all the elements of the campaign. It's important to also gain consensus on campaign goals and overall coalition operating guidelines. The planning tool outlines:

- The coalition's diverse stakeholders
- The campaign goal
- The campaign coalition's operating assumptions and ground rules
- The coalition objectives to reach that goal
- The work components necessary for campaign development, for example, coalition building, research and policy analysis, advocacy, communications and fundraising

The last page of the planning tool is a sign-on page. It's a place for your coalition conveners to acknowledge the understanding of their commitment to the campaign and their willingness to participate fully. It's a pact that you're all in this together and ready to move full speed ahead. Now move!

> ✐ You can find a detailed "About Time Campaign" Operations Planning Tool for your campaign coalition in Appendix II, pp. 16 - 18.

Next, your convening partners should work together to recruit other organizations that are dedicated to your issue and can offer something to your collaborative campaign.

Every coalition needs these three things: resources, voices and political clout. When recruiting potential partners, you'll generally be looking for their ability to contribute one or more of these. Many partners may be able to offer a financial commitment to coalition activities or dedicated staff time and campaign experience. But don't overlook the smaller or lesser-known organizations. Many times, they're the ones who have strong community networks and can turn out real affected constituents for your issue.

No matter what their contribution is, you must make sure that every potential partner in your operational coalition fully understands that there's real work to be done. To win, there are objectives to meet every step of the way along the campaign timeline and participation is critical. Every coalition member must be willing to help build and share the power of the campaign when things are looking up…and the blame, as well as the work to get back on track, when things go wrong.

Organizing the Campaign Infrastructure

We define a public policy campaign as a series of connected events and activities that together, over a period of time, result in a new or improved public policy. 'Campaign operations' refers to the planning, coordinating and connecting that happens behind these events and activities.

The best advice from successful public policy advocates is to organize your organizational resources by task. Our chart below lists the standard campaign jobs by task that should have an assigned team leader. Most low-budget campaigns do just fine by utilizing two or three talented people who have multiple responsibilities. Some medium-budget campaigns find it useful to insert an experienced consultant into a

📖 See p. 193 of *Real Clout* on the hiring of campaign consultants.

campaign to help with press, message development or political analysis.

Description of Team Leaders and Qualifications		
Job	**Description**	**Qualifications**
Coalition Operations and Development Director	Managing coalition decision making and budget; also fundraising and internal communications. Reports to the steering committee.	Experienced project and people manager; good consensus building skills.
Director of Policy and Research	Managing ongoing policy research and message development.	Policy 'wonk' who can write clear prose; possibly a short-term consultant.
Grassroots Mobilization Director	Managing membership outreach, education and mobilization.	Inspirational 'cheerleader' type who can manage mass communication skills.
Media Relations Director	Managing earned media, paid ads and	Experienced 'spinmaster' in the public policy

	other public awareness activities.	arena; possibly a short-term consultant.
State Capital Operations Director	Coordinating professional and grassroots lobbying activities directed at public policymakers in the executive or legislative branches.	Respected, experienced public policy advocate; possibly a short-term consultant.

THE BASICS

A Pre-Campaign Timeline

If the reader thought our definition of a public policy campaign (as a series of connected events and activities that together, over a period of time, result in a new or improved public policy) was a bit understated and simplistic, wait until you see our campaign timeline chart.

Planning and Other Pre-Campaign Activities		
Task/Activity	**Team Leader(s)**	**Product(s)**
Message Development	Policy Research, Media Relations	A verbal rap; 1-page fact sheet; 10-page background for public policy arena, media, potential coalition members and potential state house champions
Policy and Political Analysis	Policy Research, State Capital Operations	Identification of solution options for executive and legislative branches and briefing of potential state house champions
Coalition Building/Solicitation of Partners	Coalition Operations	Choosing of steering committee who in turn, devise and approve a coalition governance agreement
Coalition Fundraising	Coalition Operations	Budget and fundraising plan in place
Internal Membership Education and Mobilization	Grassroots Mobilization, Policy Research	Develop training materials and identify grassroots leaders

Implementation (Or, Herding Cats)		
Task/Activity	**Team Leader(s)**	**Product(s)**
Focused Message Development	Policy Research, Steering Committee, State Capital Operations, Media relations	Specialized verbal raps, fact sheets, customized backgrounder for each audience, regional media events,
Policy and Political Analysis	Steering Committee, Policy Research, State Capital Operations, State House Champions	Refined solution options, thoroughly analyzed and prioritized, bottom lines established

THE BASICS

Coalition Communications and Maintenance, Solicitation of New Partners	Coalition Operations, Steering Committee	Coalition trust building through ongoing communications, regular briefings, open decision making procedures and a fair process for resolving differences.
Budget and Fundraising	Steering Committee, Coalition Operations	Prompt reporting of expenditures, ongoing solicitation of funds.
Internal Membership Education and Mobilization	Grassroots Mobilization, Policy Research, Steering Committee, Media Relations	Develop training materials, identify grassroots leaders, conduct trainings, ongoing communication

The Care and Feeding of Heroes

There is no limit to what one can accomplish if one doesn't care about getting the credit.

These words never comforted us when somebody else took the credit for one of our hard-won accomplishments and it certainly doesn't apply in the public policy arena filled with elected and appointed officials whose life blood is claiming credit for solving a policy problem during a re-election campaign. It's a brave thing to put one's personal and public reputation on the line to become a champion of a complex solution to a complicated problem. To succeed, one needs smart staff, good intelligence, political savvy, physical stamina and superhuman patience with all the stakeholders in the problem and the solution. Credit is the only reward a politician has.

Make sure they get it – in your campaign materials, your press releases, at your rallies at your organization's annual meetings and most importantly, in their district, among their constituents accompanied by photos at every opportunity.

There is a lot of competition for good hero opportunities and if your campaign promises to provide relief to a community that has suffered from a longstanding problem you will have plenty of public officials wanting to get on board for their share of the credit.

📖 Read this story of how three advocates, both inside and outside of the 'system,' worked together to mount a successful campaign directed at county commissioners but made sure that their mayor got credit. See

THE BASICS

The Care and Feeding of Heroes in…

…The Legislature

Lead Sponsors

Your goal is to recruit two well-liked legislators – one in each branch, who are 'savvy smart' and have some legislative history on your issue. Look for vice chairs or senior members of the Ways & Means Committee or the committee that will be conducting hearings on your bill. If you are looking for someone to lead a campaign to amend the budget the same recruiting standards apply. You should have an explicit discussion with each sponsor to make sure they are able/willing to consider your bill or budget item as one of their three or four top priorities and if they and their staff are able/willing to work with you to carry out the necessary "in-house" tasks. Your goal is for your lead sponsors to consider you as "adjunct staff" always ready with the newest facts and draft materials.

Co-Sponsors

Recruit as many as you can. This is the time to ask your grassroots coordinator to send an alert to all the grassroots leaders asking them to solicit their own representatives and senators.

✐ Legislative Heroes' To-Do List & Contact Chart: pages 19 & 20 in Appendix II

…The Executive Branch

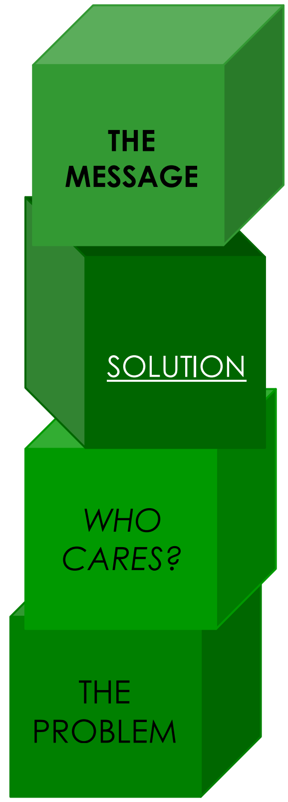
Chances are you have already tried to get the governor and or other high-level managers to fix your problem through administrative means, and they have given you one excuse after another. BUT do not despair! Sooner or later you will identify a couple of middle-level managers or key staff to high-level managers, who will recognize that getting their Boss behind your campaign offers a very private Hero Opportunity for them. In Chapter 3 of Real Clout (pp. 76-78), we describe these folks as "Inside Advocates," (see Chapter 1 Blue Pages, p. 27, for a definition) and they truly are people whose job satisfaction is getting things done with NO public credit.

Your communications with them will be mostly private and confidential. You may ask them to give you a heads up on any pending development that affects your campaign, but you must never, never ask them to betray their boss and you must promise never to set their boss up to look like a fool or mark them as a public target. With that bargain, you'll get useful

✐ To-Do List for Administrative Heroes & Contact Chart: pages 21 & 22 in Appendix II.

data, priceless political intelligence and a lot of informed advice about how to recruit the boss to go public in support.

THE MESSAGE



Step 3 - In Chapter 1, you identified the problem and key stakeholders. Now, with the help of those experienced, knowledgeable and politically savvy potential heroes in the administration, the legislature and among your special-interest group policy partners, you can begin to focus on several optional solutions to your policy problem. This entails working carefully and respectfully to chart all the possible solutions and noting:

- Which solutions have been tried before;
- Which solutions have the most historical support or opposition; and
- Which solutions are the most affordable, most effective and most

📖 Check out 'The Model Workplan,' Chapter 6, Phase 1 on pp. 183-184 of

likely to succeed within the present political dynamic.

Step 4 - In full partnership with your heroes in the administration, the legislature and your special interest policy partners, you have

📖 Check out Chapter 5 of *Real Clout*, pp. 156-160, including the power

documented the effectiveness and affordability of your policy solution to a particular pressing public problem. You are then ready to move forward and promote your positive policy change as an incremental step toward a long-term solution.

THE MESSAGE

Campaign Materials

Use the message tool to develop various message vehicles including fact sheets, research reports, talking points for press statements and public hearings, committee hearings and even campaign slogans and bumper stickers. Every message vehicle, should tell the audience the following:

> **FILL-IN-THE-BLANKS MESSAGE TOOL**
>
> ______ is in crisis because ______.
>
> You should care because ________.
>
> We know that _________ will begin to fix it

- ✓ What exactly is the public policy problem that has to be fixed?
- ✓ What exactly is your solution?
- ✓ Why exactly should the audience (public policymaker, constituent, allied organization) care about it?
- ✓ What exactly can they do to help, and who do they contact to get involved or to answer any questions?

✎ Blank message tool: Appendix I, page 1

Use it:

- To persuade an important audience to do something to advance your campaign.
- To persuade allies to join your coalition.
- To convince private donors to contribute to your campaign.
- To recruit affected constituents into your district based grassroots network.
- To highlight the message in a district meeting with an elected policymaker.
- In an elevator conversation at the state capital with a trapped public policymaker.
- To ask a legislator to be a key sponsor for your bill.
- To ask a public manager to begin a process to amend regulations.
- To ask the governor to issue an executive order.
- To ask the legislative leadership to schedule your bill for debate.
- To ask the commissioner to stand with you at a press conference.

- To introduce draft legislation and regulations, any section by section analysis of your bill, Q&A papers and FAQs.
- To develop fact sheets, ten-page reports with charts and footnotes, press releases, letters to the editor, and op-eds.

A Note on Polling

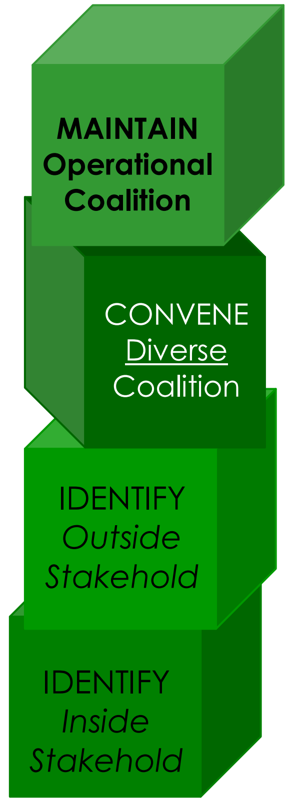
If your policy solution does requires a substantial change in operations or in the profit margins of powerful stakeholders (e.g., imagine requiring public employees to learn multiple languages or hospitals to provide free care or employers to pay a living wage), you will need to build "public demand" for your solution. You should make calls to action in the earned and paid media. To find out how your issue is perceived by the general public you should think about commissioning a poll or focus group to discover their bad attitudes, deep prejudices and lack of information. Who among the general public knows about your issue, defines it as a problem, cares about whether it gets fixed or not and could possibly, with lot of work, get mobilized to help you fix it? And conversely, who among the public might get motivated to keep the status quo?

While you are assessing your need for a professional poll you will still need to conduct an "insider" poll of key opinion leaders in the state capital.

Finding a pollster

This is easier than you think. You may already have some allies in your coalition who use pollsters on a regular basis, and this can be considered an in-kind contribution. Or, you can send out word of your search and will soon find yourself flooded with calls and emails from a number of different sources. Ask one of them how much it would cost and talk with them to develop a project you can afford.

THE STRATEGY



Get ready to deal with the politics of coalition building and maintenance! Some of us who are more controlling and impatient than we should be used to think that coalition politics made the state capital seem like a church, until we learned a little more about church politics.

You've identified the stakeholders who have the most interest, resources and availability to participate in your policy issue. Now your job is to convene a diverse coalition of those key stakeholders, including traditional and nontraditional allies, and identify and recruit champions in the administration and legislature.

Start by officially convening a manageable group of influential special-interest groups to recruit other self-interested traditional and untraditional partners. Then transform this group into a power-sharing coalition to design and implement a public policy campaign. The convening committee can also officially reach out to recruit the identified inside advocates in the administration and heroes in the legislature.

THE STRATEGY

Coalition Politics (The following is excerpted from *Real Clout*.)

Lesson # 1: **Build a power-sharing coalition.** *Operational coalitions* are those where each participating organization has made an official, board-approved decision to share power, credit and blame with other members of the coalition.

Lesson # 2: **Recruit nontraditional allies.** *Nontraditional allies* have a couple of distinguishing characteristics. First, they usually have completely different perspectives on the same issue, e.g., consumers and providers. Second, there is often a long history of conflict and even confrontation between the partners. Finally there is often a striking difference in organizational capacity, resources and decision-making cultures which goes beyond the usual turf and competition issues among traditional coalition partners.

Lesson # 3: **Recognize and respect cultural differences.** The first symptom of distress among nontraditional allies is mutual cultural shock over process issues that mask important unresolved questions about the balance of power. A typical balance of power question is: Which organizations carry the most weight – the partners who have a lot of resources (usually the providers), or the partners who have the ability to deliver and mobilize a sympathetic constituency (usually the consumer advocacy organizations)? The struggle over power can be finally resolved when the consumer organizations realize how much the campaign depends on the providers' resources and the providers realize how much the campaign needs the consumers with their attractive constituency.

Words to the Wise

1. ***Set up a "steering committee" composed of the major partners who have a high level of commitment to the campaign.*** Each organization should be able to contribute something of unique value to the campaign in at least one of three categories:

A. *Cash/fundraising capacity*

B. *Grassroots capacity* to deliver sympathetic consumers/beneficiaries able to inform and motivate public policymakers

C. *Political capital* – policy expertise and demonstrated political credibility at the state house

2. ***Set up a democratic governance structure that allows for a full and factual discussion of issues, the honest resolution of conflict and a satisfactory planning and evaluation process.*** That means:

THE STRATEGY

A. *Establishing a clear understanding of the decision making process* (e.g., Majority rules? Weighted votes? Consensus? Veto power?)

B. *Adequately briefing coalition members in writing or e-mail* before regularly scheduled meetings and emergency meetings

C. *Implementing clear communications between meetings that include future action plans*

Organizing and Mobilizing Grassroots Activists Into Action

A winning plan depends on a campaign's ability to organize and mobilize a district-based grassroots network of affected constituents into a coordinated series of activities designed to persuade key policymakers to fix their community problem.

The job of the field director is to recruit, mobilize, train and tend to the care and feeding of a district-based organization of affected constituents.

Nothing is more humbling and inspiring to an experienced, state capital-based insider than to meet with grassroots activists ready and willing to do what has to be done in their community to win the campaign. Whatever their motivation – to relieve personal pain, to prevent that kind of pain from being inflicted on anybody else, to play out a role as an important community leader, or to play out a role as a good neighbor – these folks are ready to work. They are there, sitting in a small room to hear you, a complete stranger, tell them how their state capital "really works" and how they can influence the policymaking process.

Chances are they are pretty cynical about politics and politicians in general, although they might have a more positive view of their legislative delegation. Chances are they have called an elected official at least a couple of times before – sometimes around a major public debate in the state around abortion, the death penalty or gay marriage; and sometimes around more local issues like the funding of public schools or the placement of a methadone clinic in the neighborhood.

The suggested recruitment, training and mobilization techniques that follow are drawn from the experiences of the veteran public policy entrepreneurs. Their experiences have taught them that mobilizing self-interested constituents into public policy campaigns is not only the best way to inform and motivate public policy makers, it also a provides a platform for leadership development and the individual empowerment of participants.

THE STRATEGY

Identifying and Recruiting Local Activists Into Action

Step 1: Start with your base. *Start by drafting the membership of coalition partners.*

Since some organizations do not demand much from their members except dues, be prepared to give them some help in developing a good internal membership education and outreach effort. Encourage all your coalition partners to customize the campaign message for their own organization and figure out how to get a Call to Action message out through regularly scheduled meetings, newsletters or even a special membership alert mailing. The Call to Action should help members see their own or their organizations' direct self-interest in the campaign; persuade them that their personal participation in district meetings with their own local public policymakers is necessary and critical; and should reassure them that they will be part of a powerful, statewide coalition effort that means to win concrete improvement in the lives of the participants.

Step 2: Expand your base. *Start by asking local activists* to develop a list of community organizations and institutions that might support the campaign and produce volunteers for meetings with local public policymakers. For instance, tobacco control activists can usually get endorsements and volunteers through the local Heart and Lung Associations as well as the American Cancer Society and Boards of Health. Advocates for the underserved and uninsured can get support from local churches, social service agencies and neighborhood health centers, and they can find affected constituents by putting up flyers at neighborhood meetings and posting notices in laundromats or other service venues.

Use the local media, including church bulletins and weekly shoppers, to invite the public to community meetings. You should also check out the local radio stations and cable TV shows for opportunities to reach out to affected constituents and volunteers.

Step 3: Organize activists into state or local district-based networks. *Start by identifying local coordinators.* Each organization's board and staff should be asked to identify key members throughout the state who can be recruited into taking a local coordinating role.

Some campaigns bring local coordinators into one statewide training and briefing meeting in order to build solidarity and a sense of power. Other campaigns have improved attendance by holding regional training meetings. In both cases, the agenda should always include:

- A briefing on the policy issue – the problem and the proposed solution;
- A briefing on the public policy making process – how this particular administration and/or legislature makes policy, and how by working together we can influence the process by offering our solution to solve their policy problem; and
- A briefing package that summarizes the key public policymakers themselves. It should include information on the leadership in the administration and/or legislature with addresses, phone numbers, pictures and a little background on the issue if possible.

Ask the local coordinators to go back home and immediately begin to organize a local training session that includes a variation of the same three items:

1. A briefing on the policy issue – the problem and the proposed solution;
2. A briefing on the public policymaking process – how this particular administration and/or legislature makes policy, and how by working together with people from all over the state they can influence the process by offering their solution to solve the policy problem; and
3. A briefing package that summarizes the key public policymakers themselves. It should include information on the leadership in the administration and/or the legislature with addresses, phone numbers, pictures and a little background on the issue if possible. Also include a detailed briefing on local policymakers that includes input from community activists who have worked with them in the past.

Step 4: Set Up a Web-based Email System or Update Current Systems. It's easier than ever before to manage and communicate with a field organization.

Leadership development activities

THE STRATEGY

Use regular e-mail updates with the same kind of in-depth background summaries that are going to policymakers. Make regular "emergency" conference calls to solicit advice. Hold statewide and/or regional in-person meetings at least twice a year. Communicate prominent roles at fun events like press conferences, lobby days and rallies.

Organizational solidarity-building activities

Set up a website of your own with regular updates, photos and local reports. Coordinate lobby days at the state capital at least twice a year, and tie in press events on the same day with email follow up.

TOUGH QUESTIONS AND EASY ANSWERS

On Non-Profit Lobbying

Q: We are a small non-profit with less than a one quarter million dollar budget, and three quarters of that is from foundations that forbid us to use their grant money for lobbying. Our office is in a neighborhood in the capital city, and we are involved as coalition members in various campaigns from affordable housing to child care. I know how to segregate our restricted money. I know how to keep track of staff time, printing, copying and other lobbying expenses and report it to the IRS, and I know we have to limit our expenditures on lobbying to 5%. But because we are in the capital city, a lot of statewide groups ask us if we can find within our membership a "real person" affected by the problem to talk to the press or participate in a meeting with a key policymaker – on short notice too!!

There are two questions actually:

1. Do we have to count the staff time spent on preparing a volunteer member to participate in a meeting or interview with the press in support of a specific budget item?

2. Do you have any advice on about filing for a 501(c)3 that will permit us to spend 20% of our budget on lobbying? My accountant says yes, but my lawyer says it will only attract the attention of the IRS and that we're already in the public eye too much.

A:

1. Yes, count the staff time spent preparing any volunteer leader to testify/interview/ advocate urging a specific position on a specific bill or budget item. As you know, your IRS report does not demand specifics, just total time, but you should still keep a little memo stating the facts.

2. Tell your lawyer to get a life. The IRS has bigger fish to fry! Or see Appendix III for resources on Worry-Free Advocacy from The Alliance for Justice.

On Working with Nontraditional Partners

Q: We are a very big non-profit that has always done excellent work about a specific disease. We have a yearly public education campaign in schools; we raise dollars for research and treatment; and run a number of support programs to assist victims, survivors and their families. We have a new regional director who is urging us to get the state government to appropriate some money to establish a prevention and screening program for uninsured people. We're having trouble getting some of our board and volunteers involved because they think it's too political, and they just don't want to partner with elected officials.

A: Take good care of board and volunteers who were originally recruited to provide direct service to victims and their families as well as raise money to find a cure. Chances are they joined you because of their direct personal involvement with someone who suffered from the disease, and their original impulse to be helpful and generous has been personally rewarded by your organization telling them stories of families who have been assisted and research advances toward a cure. It will take time to mount another kind of storytelling education campaign documenting the growing number of uninsured working families who have little or no access to any kind of prevention and screening programs but you can do it. When the American Cancer Society decided to take on the tobacco industry as the number one cause of preventable cancer in the late 80s, they spent years educating their very prestigious board members before getting them to willingly partner with high-level politicians – promoting a tax increase of all things! To be sure, there was a very controversial and difficult internal debate and some board members and volunteers eventually declined to participate in or contribute to the ACS's "political" activities. Even so, trillions of dollars have been appropriated to provide tobacco treatment and cessation programs as well as cancer screening and treatment for the uninsured, so hooray for those ACS board members and volunteers who entered the political fray!

On Communications and the Media

Q: We're in the middle of a pretty controversial campaign, and a couple of our board members think it's time for us to consider hiring a PR firm to manage the media and are even willing to raise some money to pay for it. While a couple of us have had pretty decent experiences working on electoral campaigns with PR consultants, most of the staff think it's insulting. Any advice?

A: It is maddening to have the campaign advisors assume your team doesn't have the skills, contacts or experience to handle the earned media on your campaign. Well, perhaps you really don't, and maybe it's time to regard this as an opportunity to learn from experienced people *who have good track records working on similar policy campaigns, have good contacts in the local media and don't have 'attitude' (e.g., are they willing to come in for regular meetings; willing to share information and contracts; willing to mentor existing press staff?). Remember, 'attitude' goes in both directions, and consultants need you – your personal work products and cooperation – to succeed in their job more than you need them to succeed in yours. A positive attitude will get the most out of any consultant, whether they make magic or make a mess.*