Advocating for Low-Income Programs/Leveraging: The Beginning

THE FUNDAMENTAL NEGOTIATION RULE:

YOU'VE GOT TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS TO GET WHAT YOU WANT.

1. What Is Your Goal? (What it is you want to do?)
   a. More funding for programs direct service
   b. Increase administrative funds for agency
   c. Improve energy assistance or energy efficiency program design
   d. Correct some heinous public policy that affects low-income adversely
   e. "Green" low income programs
   f. Promote energy efficiency generally

2. Who Is Your Target? (Whom, are you trying to influence?)
   a. Utility
   b. Public Utility Commission regulating Invester Owned Utilities
   c. Public Utility Board of Commissioners
   d. Legislature
   e. Other public interest/community groups

3. What Is Your Authority? (What gives you the right? Who sanctioned you?)
   a. Local agency serving low-income (L-I experts & local)
   b. Group of agencies (e.g., all served by the same utility)
   c. State association
   d. Consumer rights
   e. Coalition of energy efficiency advocates (environmentalists & environmental justice advocates

4. What Are Your Strengths? (Why you?)
   a. Low-income expertise (you know the population)
   b. Program provider (you know the programs)
   c. Have local partnerships? (You know the other poverty players in your area)
   d. Have media relationships
   e. Politically connected
   f. Vivid illustrations of need

5. What Do You Need? (How do you get there?)
   a. $$$
   b. Technical expertise/strategic thinking
   c. Legal expertise (how to handle adjudicatory processes, legislative processes, etc.
   d. Partnerships
   e. Data
   f. Media outreach

6. Where Can You Get Resources?
   a. $$$
      i. WAP funding – leveraging allowance
      ii. HHS funding (Assurance 16 still legal?)
      iii. Grants/foundations
      iv. Intervener funding
   b. Expertise
      i. NCAF website
      ii. LIHEAP Clearing House
      iii. NCLC (manuals)
      iv. Low-income advocates network
      v. Hired guns (Oppenheim, MacGregor, Colton, Crandall, Schlegel, etc.)
      vi. Energy Efficiency organizations (ACEEE, NWEC, NEEC, etc.)
      vii. Pro bono legal aid
   c. Data
      i. EEI
      ii. RCS
      iii. Census/American Community Survey
      iv. LIHEAP Clearinghouse

Assessing Your Advocacy and Leveraging Options: Planning Templates, Tools, First Steps

The development of strategies should be a thoughtful process, and include information that is specific to your organization, your goals, and your ability to oversee such a leveraging goal/project you may visualize. The identification of assets, barriers, stakeholder identification, and resources available, are all very important in order to establish successful short/medium and long term strategies and goals.

STEPS:

1) Defining Success at your desk– YOUR success – this make take time, research, and revisions

- Write down the project/partnership outcome you wish, concisely but with bulleted bottom line detail (e.g. if a WAP/Utility Partnership: program budget draft, # of units weatherized, outreach and intake responsibility and costs, education, integration with other funding sources if necessary, types of units to be weatherized, timeline for implementation, administrative costs and if included in program design, cost tests used by regulatory commission if any, evaluation requirements)
- List out demographics in the community of those in need.
- Write down a list of the advantages and opportunities present for all the parties.
- Put the above in a draft proposal format

2) Get Your Own Organizational Support- very important~!

- In order to move forward with your plan, the support of your community based organization's decision makers (Board of Directors, Executive Director, Program Director) should be in place.
- Determine whether anyone on staff or the board of your organization has a tie in with your project partners, utility commission, utility staff, housing policymakers, legislators, etc.

→**Once you are clear on what <u>you</u> hope to accomplish,** organize a strategic planning session within your organization, with leadership. As part of this process, **the group will need to internally identify and list out each of the following bullets** – and once identified, this information could help reveal the best strategies and action plan to undertake for success, and will continue to be good historical reference information:

- <u>group goals/expectations</u> from such a project, or needs and goals for constituency served
- <u>groups assets</u>: membership, community liaisons, coalition membership, grants/program/financial management track record, current state and federal funding opportunities, etc
- realistically <u>identify barriers</u> – include lack of office support staff, bureaucracy issues, limited time, limited dollars, lack of legislative support, limited funding for experts/consulting, etc.
- <u>identify all stakeholders</u> for undertaking your project/partnership – include other programs, clients, agencies, coalitions, contractors, legal services, volunteer groups to provide support (include AmeriCorps, Senior Volunteers, Pro-Bono legal counsel, utilities, etc.)
- <u>identify windows of opportunity</u>, including current political initiatives, census reports released that identify issues, policymakers initiatives or newly elected officials and their agendas, state and federal rulemaking, grant cycle funding, rate cases, etc.
- <u>develop Short Term, Mid-Term, and Long-Term Strategy bullets</u>
- finally, <u>write out an action plan</u> for this leveraging project, and include 1) WHAT it is, 2) WHO is responsible for each step, 3) WHEN it will be done, and 4) NOTES specific to each item

** ONCE YOU & YOUR AGENCY ARE CLEAR ON YOUR GOALS: **

3) Find a Champion within the Utility or Your Project Partner –
- This is a safe way to get your foot in the door and to start garnering support.
- Layout your goals with them. Let them know the overall need for this project/partnership.
- Let them know the support you have from others in the community/network.

4) Bring in community support for the project/partnership.
- Obtain letters of support – including:
- local politicians (mayor, city council, county commission, state reps)
- Other agencies (seniors, farm workers, league of women voters, local welfare rights, unions, vendors, State Community Development, Housing or Energy offices

5) Meet with your Partner/Utility representatives.
- Request a meeting with the champion in the utility/partnership group (or your goal group) to talk about your issue. If a utility partnership proposal, set up a meeting with Utility Commission staff and/or Utility Commissioner. In these meetings, discuss the need of low-income households and the benefits of your proposal. With weatherization as an example, invite them out to a site demo to see the technical diagnostic approach that is used to assure effectiveness and savings.

6) The Role of the Media
- Use the local newspaper(s) to do a piece on your proposal subject – if weatherization, put a human face on the issue. Have the come out to a low-income citizen/ratepayer home to see weatherization technical diagnostics and applications in progress, and to also interview someone that is/has benefited.
- This media exposure puts local pressure on decision makers and also better informs them of the program/proposal.

7) Bring in other examples of successful programs/partnerships…
- with utilities: examples of successful utility funded low-income weatherization programs, either in their service areas in other states, or with other utilities in your state.

8) Participate in the (utility) decision-making process:
- request time on a utility board meeting agenda for a presentation on the issue – although ultimately it is the utility commission who would make such a decision.
- Have visuals for presentation, perhaps a power point program, that show pre and post weatherization, diagnostic equipment used … and the human face that demonstrates need.

9) Be present to answer questions when this issue is discussed / when this issue comes up for a vote.
- This step, in utility and regulatory venues particularly, may require the attendance at many different meetings. If you are not at the table for most meetings, you may find yourself on the menu.
- Have low-income citizens that stand to directly benefit in the audience, and have someone speak at the public comment period.
- Have some of the stakeholder groups that you have garnered support from there to speak on your behalf.

10) Persistence
- Defending your accomplishments in future challenges brought about by staff changes, financial pressures at your end, or the partnership/utility end. Continue the advocate/watchdog role. Always be alert for opportunities to keep improving the program design and funding levels.

SOME EXCERPTS TAKEN FROM MICHAEL KARP'S "A TEN-STEP ACTION PROGRAM FOR COMMUNITY BASED ORGANIZATIONS"

How a Rate Case Happens

The utility:

Under collects revenue due to warm weather, conservation, etc.

Adds new resources or infrastructure

Wants more money

Files for a rate increase at the PUC

At an Open Meeting the PUC accepts or suspends the filing.

Parties petition to intervene in rate case.

Intervening parties hire witnesses, ask lots of questions (called "Discovery").

[Settlement negotiations?]

Intervening parties file their testimony.

Evidentiary Hearing; Public Hearing.

The company files answering testimony ("Rebuttal").

Interveners file answering testimony to Rebuttal ("Surrebuttal").

Commissioners deliberate

Commissioners hand down decision.

Start over.

Being Effective at the State Legislature

(Courtesy of Jeff Schlegel, South West Energy Efficiency Project)

The Steps

- Sponsor(s)
- Draft (write) the bill
- Introduce the bill
- Committee hearings (usually several)
- Passed on floor of one house (House or Senate)
- Similar process in other house
- If changed, conference committee (concur)
- Final passage
- Signed or vetoed by Governor

How to be Effective*

(*If you don’t have a fleet of paid and don’t make large campaign contributions)d lobbyists)

- Be credible (subject matter expert)
- Be honest at all times
- Be cordial and responsive (helpful)
- Know your audience and speak to their issues
- Build and nurture relationships (legislators, legislative staff, other lobbyists)
- Find, educate, and nurture champions
- Develop allies and ask them to help you
- Use good judgment; know what to do, when
- Have a (flexible) plan and strategies to succeed

"Dos & Don'ts" of Citizen Lobbying

Do:

- Make an appointment.
- Be on time - but be prepared to wait.
- Be cordial to the assistant.
- Introduce yourself.
- Be honest.
- If you don't know something, say so – and follow up.
- Thank the public official for the meeting.
- Enjoy your visit - you are one of the few people making change!

Don't:

- Be angry
- Threaten
- Be afraid to be assertive
- Have a lot of material
- Lose credibility

Senator Lisa Brown's 10 Tips for Working with Your Legislature

1. **It's not enough to be Right.** You need to understand the political process, access the power, and engage the personal relationships.

2. **Do whatever you are comfortable with on the advocacy continuum, but DO IT!**

3. **Your actions are multiplied when you are involved with organiza-tions who are involved in the process.**

4. **Understand the process.** See that your work is focused on the right people at the right times; e.g. Committee Chairs. Think through the whole bill process, to the Governor's desk and back to the start to figure out how you are going to get there.

5. **Follow the Money.** Who influences the key decision makers? Who gets to them?

6. **Make your meeting productive.** Introduce self and issue as briefly as possible – use a one-pager. Be specific – tell them what you want and what you want THEM to do. Ask for something measurable. If there is a downside for them, tell them.

7. **There are 2 currencies in the legislature – 1) a person's Integrity and 2) Information.** Interest is in preventing the worst case scenario and in getting the most good for the most parties. Where are others on the issue?

8. **Don't Burn Bridges.**

9. **Use staff in creative ways to get your message out.** Personal staff, committee staff, caucus staff - use them to get to the decision-maker.

10. **Use creative ways to get the message across.** e.g., Thanking them for what they did last year as an entrée for a new issue. Can you legitimately tie your issue to something else you know is important to them?

Lisa Brown is the Senator representing the area around Spokane in the Washington State Senate and a good friend on low-income issues.

Burgeoning Issues for Low-Income Advocates

1. Decoupling
2. Straight Fixed/Variable Rates (SFV)
3. Smart Meters and Time of Use (TOU) Rates
4. Demand Response Supplanting Conservation Programs
5. Rising Costs to Do the Work vs. Cost-Effectiveness
6. Impact of Green House Gas (aka GHG) and Carbon Policies

Elements for Fair and Effective Decoupling

(Adapted from notes provided by Jim Lazar, Consulting Economist)

1. Increased/Real Commitment to Invest in Efficiency
2. Progressive Rate Design (Inverted Block Rates)
3. Adjusted Capital Structure/Rate of Return (ROR)
4. Rate Collar (limited increase/year, and can't exceed allowed ROR)
5. Scheduled Periodic Rate Cases