

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CAUSE

ADVOCACY: The strategic use of information and action to shape opinions, policies and practices that affect people's lives. (from Ipas, "Providers as Advocates" curriculum module, developed by OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc. 2008)

Advocacy Perspective – Case Example:

"A leading newspaper writes a story about the rise of DWI traffic violations among Hispanic drivers. The article contains misinformation about alcohol use in the Hispanic community and warns readers of the need for more police checkpoints."

Board Member with Advocacy Perspective (Responds to situation with advocacy)

Example: Board member Professor N., a professor of anthropology who's research related to alcohol use in communities of color, writes a letter to the newspaper with correct rates of use and DWI violations related to alcohol across families, regardless of race or class.

VERSUS

Board Member without Advocacy Perspective (Responds to situation by continuing to volunteer but does not undertake advocacy)

Example: Professor N. keeps attending board meetings and supports the organization but does not take any steps to inform the public about the misrepresentations of Latinos in the media.

Advocacy takes many forms. We tend to think of advocacy as very formal and direct – for example, lobbying your elected officials, testifying before a legislative committee, or writing a letter to the editor. These are important forms of advocacy – and especially effective when conducted by volunteers, including board members.

Board members also can support the organization’s advocacy efforts by keeping the organization, its mission, and its constituents top of mind in all aspects of your life – at home, at work, out and about in your community, and in other civic or volunteer situations. Board members can...

- ⇒ Share **data** on the issues in easy-to-understand language in order to dispel myths and generate informed dialogue.
- ⇒ Share **stories** about the struggles, contributions, and concerns of your organization’s constituents in order to generate understanding, compassion, and solidarity.
- ⇒ Leverage **relationships and influence** to shape public opinion, institutional practices, and/or public policies.

The board as a whole has a responsibility to:

- ❑ Provide overall **strategic direction** to staff and support the corresponding advocacy strategy developed by staff.
- ❑ Partner with the staff to develop clear, coherent advocacy **messages** that board members can use in both formal and informal advocacy.
- ❑ Provide the **resources** for staff, board, and other volunteers to develop the skills and confidence to serve as advocates for the organization.

SOME TAKE AWAYS:

1. Advocacy is giving voice to our passions and standing up for the people and principles we hold dear.
2. Everyone has a unique style – discover and develop your own advocacy voice.
3. Advocacy calls for different, equally important, skills and roles. Develop and deepen your advocacy toolkit.
4. Any time we advocate for our position, we draw attention to ourselves and this is paradoxical: we can benefit from more people knowing about our cause and we can feel more vulnerable from the attention we get. Each of us needs to decide what actions feel right and safe for our circumstances.
5. Knowing who your allies are can help you feel more empowered to advocate for causes you believe in.
6. “You don’t need to know everything, but it’s helpful to know 1 or 2 things.”
7. Advocates work BEHIND THE SCENE as well as OUT IN FRONT.
8. Advocates learn from our mistakes.

ADVOCACY IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS

CASE #1: Keynote Speaker

You have been asked to speak to the local business association for their annual dinner. You mention that you plan to speak about the work you've been doing at El Pueblo and the events committee chair asks you, "What does this have to do with our business association?"

- In what ways is this an advocacy opportunity?
- What kind of advocacy might this call for and how can you respond?
- What are the risks and benefits to advocating? How can you amplify the benefits and mitigate the risks?

Case #2: Casual Conversation

You are in the locker room at your gym. Three people you barely know are discussing the recent newspaper story about raids at the food processing plant. One of them says, "They came here and took our jobs illegally. What did they expect?"

- In what ways is this an advocacy opportunity?
- What kind of advocacy might this call for and how can you respond?
- What are the risks and benefits to advocating? How can you amplify the benefits and mitigate the risks?

Case #3: Strategic Action

There's an open managerial position at your place of work and you are part of the hiring team. As the résumés come in for the manager position, you notice the team is quick to discard 2 resumes from seemingly qualified Hispanic people. When you mention this at the team meeting, you are told, "They're probably not legal to work here and besides, we need people who can speak English."

- In what ways is this an advocacy opportunity?
- What kind of advocacy might this call for and how can you respond?
- What are the risks and benefits to advocating? How can you amplify the benefits and mitigate the risks?