

10. Mobilize Support from Residents, Business and Local Officials

Advocacy means speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, directing decision-makers toward a solution, and working in partnership for the desired change.



These students built a kiosk, placed it on a public path, and interviewed passers by. Public toilet champions were then filmed to provide material for message development and advocacy.

Identifying allies and forging partnerships

Not everyone will be enthusiastic and supportive of your goal to expand public toilet availability. But to succeed you'll need an array of allies. The more people who are moving toward a common goal, the more you can achieve. After all, you are addressing a universal physiological need and one which impacts human rights, social equity, physical and mental health, environmental sustainability, and the quality and livability of our cities and towns.

So you might start by finding groups working on these broader issues. Partnering with other groups gives you access to larger segments of the community, to elected officials and to technical experts.

You also want to check to see if parts of the advocacy research you are setting out to do are already being done or whether other organizations have data that can inform your efforts. Public toilet advocates certainly need local partners when they make proposals or seek funding for specific local projects. At the same time, activists in other cities may be great allies in the early stages and in pointing the way to what works and what doesn't.⁹

Message development

Messages about public toilets are a bit challenging to develop. As you've probably discovered, toilet talk can elicit giggles or guffaws, embarrassment or shame, mild distaste or horror. As you may have discovered, in time people take you seriously. Listen to everyone and when you find people who are clear on the need for public restrooms, pay special attention. Once you've experimented with ways to frame the issue and won allies, it's probably time to go public with broader more universal messages.

⁹ "Principles of Advocacy," Community Tool Box, Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles>, accessed October 12, 2015.

The following questions can help you develop messages that resonate with your audience and move them to action.

- Who's your audience?
- Are there different segments of this audience?
- What action do you want them to take?
- What do you need to communicate?
- What words and level of formality are appropriate?
- What's the best way to frame the issues?
- What channels will you use?
- Now draft, discuss, revise and agree on key messages with your group.
- Test messages on audience members and tweak to get them just right.

Meeting with elected officials

Public officials want to hear concerns of constituents. Face-to-face meetings give them an opportunity to react and you an opportunity to hear their perspectives.

Prepare for meeting

- Arrange a meeting in advance with the appointment secretary. Don't expect more than 30 minutes; if the topic is urgent request 15. Provide a topic and names of attendees.
- With your group, decide on your message and the action you want them to take.
- Prepare limited background material in print form for use in the meeting or to leave with the official.

At the meeting

- Dress for the occasion. When talking toilets at City Hall, business attire is best.
- Gather before the meeting and enter together.

- Thank the person for their time and acknowledge their work and busy schedule.
- State your issue briefly and say why it's important to you. Find out the person's position on the issue.
- If you can't answer a question, promise to get back to them after doing the research.
- When your allotted time is up, thank them for meeting with you.

Case Story: Advocates inject public toilet issue into City Council election

Cambridge Advocates for a Common Toilet (ACT) combined the resources and voices of several community organizations to persuade the Cambridge (Massachusetts) City Councilors and City Administrators to provide a toilet facility on the Cambridge Common. In the period leading up to City Council elections, they contacted each candidate and asked for a statement. Candidates names were then posted online with their statements, or with ' No Response' noted. Visitors to the site were asked to contact each by email by clicking on buttons marked "Thank him!" or "Thank her!" or, for non-responding candidates, "Tell him to speak up!"

Source: Cambridge Advocates for a Common Toilet, "Where does your candidate stand?" accessed September 23, 2015, <http://www.cambridgeact.com/city-council-election.html>.

After the meeting

- Follow up with a collective thank you letter or a short personal note from each attendee.
- Send in any materials or information you promised.
- Stay in touch with the official through a staff person to whom you may send news, annual reports and the like.

Advocacy guidelines for nonprofit organizations

Many non-profit organizations in the U.S. fall under category 501(c)(3) United States Internal Revenue Code and are exempt from federal income tax if their activities address certain specifically stated purposes. It's important to understand and remain within the scope of what is allowed.

What is the difference between lobbying and political activity?

- Lobbying is influencing the outcome of legislation. Lobbying is a legitimate function of citizen associations and 501(c)(3) organizations. It's fine to work for the passage of ordinances that further the group's cause.
- Political activity in support of candidates in local, state or federal elections of officials is prohibited.

If your group is tax exempt in the United States under IRS 501(c)(3) you can:

- Publish and distribute a voting record that lists proposed measures, describes them, and notes how an elected official voted.
- Inform candidates of your position on issues and urge them to support your interests.
- Host a public forum to allow all candidates to discuss their views on subjects of interest to the organization.
- Distribute position papers to the general public and your members.

As a 501(c)(3), or as a non-profit aspiring to tax exemption, you cannot:

- Work as an organization for or against the election of a candidate, or endorse or oppose a particular candidate.
- Donate, as an organization, money or in-kind contributions to a candidate, political party, or political action committee.¹⁰

¹⁰ "How much lobbying can you do?" Community Tool Box, Work Group for Community Health and Development, University of Kansas, <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/changing-policies/increase-funding/main>, accessed October 23, 2015.