

Advocacy & Campaigning: an overview

Definitions

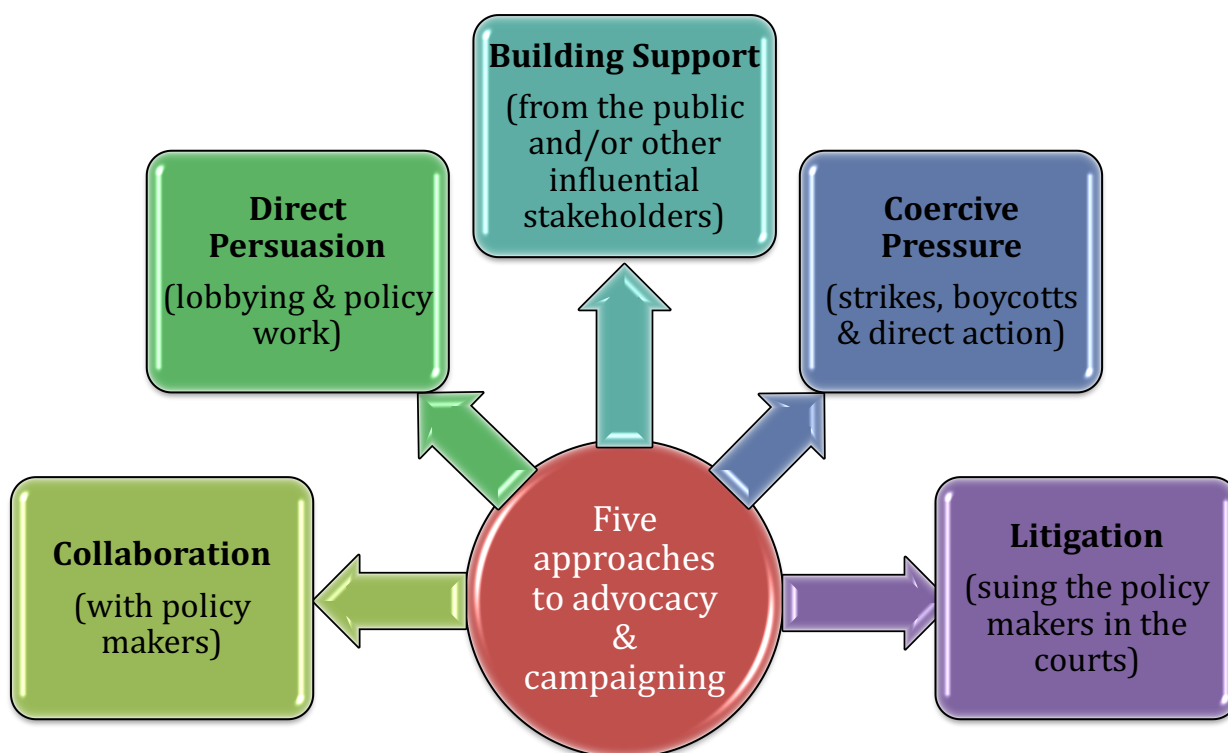
Advocacy and **campaigning** can mean the same thing. They both describe “an organised process of influencing selected people or institutions in order to achieve desired policy, practice, social, behavioural or political changes that will benefit particular groups or causes”.

However, sometimes people use the word ‘campaigning’ as shorthand for ‘public campaigning’, which is a specific approach to campaigning that involves engaging with parts of the public to win their support and/or mobilise their action.

A **campaign** is “a project or organised course of action designed to achieve a specific response from a particular audience”. Therefore we can have fundraising campaigns, election campaigns, advertising campaigns and advocacy campaigns. When we use the term ‘campaign’ in these Advocacy Guides and Toolkits, we mean a planned advocacy project (which may or may not involve engaging the public).

Different approaches

Advocacy can take many different forms – ranging from quiet and friendly ‘insider’ approaches to loud and confrontational ‘outsider’ approaches.



Which approach to take depends on what you want to achieve, the context in which you are living or operating, the capacity and assets that you have, and the barriers that you need to overcome. Most advocacy is contested, with opposition arising from vested interests, different values, alternative perspectives, competing priorities and pressure from other stakeholders.

Strategies, Tactics and Actions

An influencing strategy of ‘Theory of Change’ sets out the approach you are going to take to achieve your objectives. It will include:

- your target audiences and your influencing objectives for each of these audiences
- your core message and other communications parameters
- key moments and levers of influence

Strategies should be reasonably stable. You should not change your strategy unless the context has changed significantly or it is clear that your strategy is not working.

Tactics are how you are engaging your target audiences to achieve your influencing objectives with them. They take into account current opportunities and constraints, and are more flexible than strategies.

Actions are the things you do to deliver your strategy and tactics. Every action should have a purpose, and should get you one step closer to fulfilling your objective. As they need to be regularly updated, they are likely to be in a separate document to the strategy.

“Action without vision is only passing time, vision without action is merely daydreaming, but vision with action can change the world” (Nelson Mandela)

Common Weaknesses

Much civil society fails because it suffers from one or more of the following common weaknesses – the seven deadly sins of advocacy and campaigning.

1. **Unclear objectives.** “If you don’t know where you are going to, any road can take you there”.
2. **No influencing strategy or ‘Theory of Change’**, leading to untargeted actions, wasted effort and ultimately reduced impact.
3. **Action plans that run to an internal timetable**, rather than being determined by external events and opportunities
4. **Messages that don’t move people**, because they don’t get noticed, are vague, unfocussed, bland, technical or untargeted.
5. **Poor monitoring & evaluation**, which limits flexibility, accountability and learning
6. **Lack of innovation** in developing strategies and actions, relying on whatever was done last time
7. **Failing to focus:** trying to tackle more issues, adopt more objectives or target more audiences than resources allow.

Effective advocacy planning can help us to reduce or eliminate these weaknesses, increasing our chances of success.

Planning Process

“Failing to plan is planning to fail”

There is no ‘right way’ to do advocacy, no approach that is better than the others. You cannot take a standard advocacy plan off the shelf – each plan should be developed from scratch.

“Give me 6 hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening my axe” (Abraham Lincoln)

A structured approach to advocacy planning helps you to be strategic, making better choices to improve impact. It also is a more efficient process, focusing your attention on areas where you are in a position to make decisions. A transparent structured process also enables others to participate more effectively.

Advocacy/Campaign Strategy

- 1) Aim & Objectives
- 2) Influencing strategy
 - a) Approach
 - b) Audiences
 - c) Messages
- 3) Risks & Assumptions
- 4) Monitoring & Evaluation
- 5) Management & Coordination
- 6) Resources & Budgets
- 7) Action Plan

It is usually the case that a small group of people developing an advocacy plan will do better than one person on their own.

- a) There is a danger when planning advocacy of making unfounded assumptions about what needs to change, how change happens and the roles and positions of different actors. Sometimes, those assumptions are so deeply ingrained in us that we don't even realise that they are just assumptions – we see them as facts. By planning in a group, encouraging dialogue and debate, we are more likely to recognise those assumptions and take that uncertainty into account in our planning.
- b) As advocacy is often complex, it can be hard for one person to have all the knowledge and skills needed to develop an effective advocacy plan.
- c) Effective implementation needs a full understanding and ownership of the plan and why certain choices were made. This is easier if people have participated in the planning process. Note that participation is much more than consultation.

If a small group – a project team or task group – is responsible for developing the advocacy plan, there will still be stages in the process when other experts and stakeholders should be involved.

For example, you might invite some external experts to a workshop where you are developing your policy positions, and then you might invite some different internal and external specialists to a workshop where you develop your influencing strategy. There may be other stakeholders who you are consulting after each key stage.

It helps to start off by mapping out a process and timetable for your advocacy planning, setting out what is happening at each stage, who is involved and what resources and facilities are required.

The Advocacy & Campaigning Cycle

The Advocacy & Campaigning Cycle sets out five main **phases** for the advocacy and campaigning process. These phases are fundamental and would apply to any advocacy project, no matter how large or small or the time available for planning and implementation.

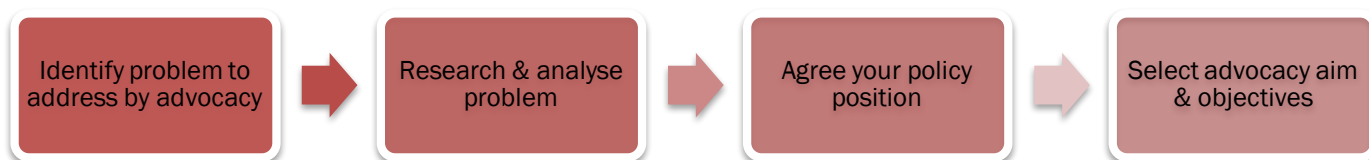


Within each of the phases, a number of **steps** are suggested that advocates can follow to help them make informed and strategic choices. The steps do not always have to be followed in a single linear path – there will often be some going back and forth as one choice helps to clarify another choice.

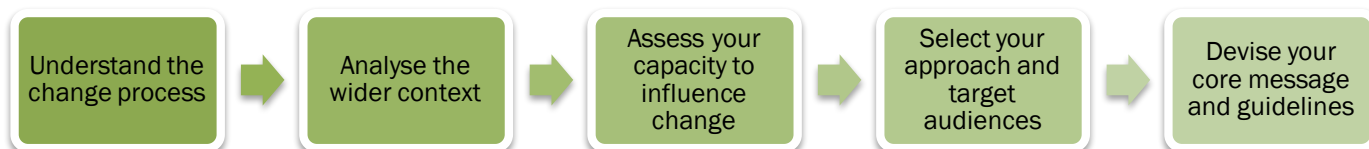
A summary of the steps in the planning pathway is shown below. More detail is given in the Guides that focus on each of the phases. These guides suggest for each step, a number of **tools** that can be used to help clarify the choices to be made. Sometimes the choices are obvious and you don't need to use a tool set them out, but often the tools can help to clarify our thinking both individually and collectively, leading to a shared analysis that is owned by all.

The Planning Pathway

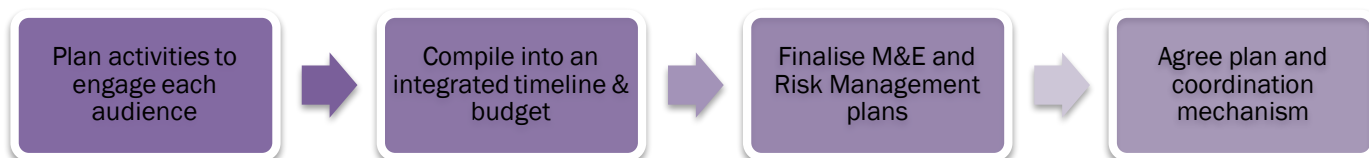
Phase 1: Know what you want to change



Phase 2: Identify the best influencing strategy



Phase 3: Devise your action plan



See Mini-Guide #2 for more on “Know what you want to change”

See Mini-Guide #3 for more on “Identify best influencing strategy”

“Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I will move the world” Archimedes

This is #1 of a series of Advocacy & Campaigning Guides written by Ian Chandler.

Each guide aims to clearly and concisely show how progressive non-profit groups can improve the impact of their advocacy and campaigning. Throughout the series, leading edge concepts and tools are introduced and explained, helping readers to focus on what is most important and make the best possible strategic choices. They can be downloaded for free from www.thepressuregroup.org

This version was updated in January 2018.

Need some help?

The Pressure Group supports progressive non-profit organisations around the world to strengthen their voice, build their power and maximise their influence. We do:

- Training and capacity building
- Strategy development & campaign planning
- Research and evaluations

For more details, go to www.thepressuregroup.org or email ianchandler@thepressuregroup.org

This guide is © Ian Chandler

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/) (reproduction is permitted for non-profit use only, providing that Ian Chandler is acknowledged as the author).



The Pressure Group Consultancy Ltd is a company registered in England & Wales # 5757443