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Helping non-profits to strengthen their impact in advocacy, campaigning & communications for social & environmental justice

Know what you want to change

The foundation for any successful advocacy and campaigning is to know exactly what it is that you want to change. Clear, specific objectives shape your choice of strategies and messages.

"If you don't know where you are going to, any road can take you there".

Definitions

Aims, Recommendations and Objectives have specific meanings in advocacy:

- The **aim** of an advocacy campaign is the reason for doing the advocacy. The aim is not to change a policy or increase a budget – it is to change people's or animal's lives or the world we live in. If this isn't specified in the aim, there is the danger of getting too focussed on the policy environment, making too many assumptions about the changes needed need, and becoming detached from the cause that should be driving you.

- In order for this aim to be fulfilled, it is likely that many different actors need to take a number of different actions. The analysis should identify these actions – they are the **recommendations** to be set out in a position paper.

- However, it is also likely that the range of recommendations is too broad to do effective advocacy on all of them. Therefore a small number of recommendations (possibly just one) should be selected on which the advocacy should focus its efforts to make happen. These are advocacy **objectives.**

- If the advocacy is to influence **institutions** (such as governments or companies), objectives can only be expressed as changes in their **policy** (including legislation) or their **practice.**

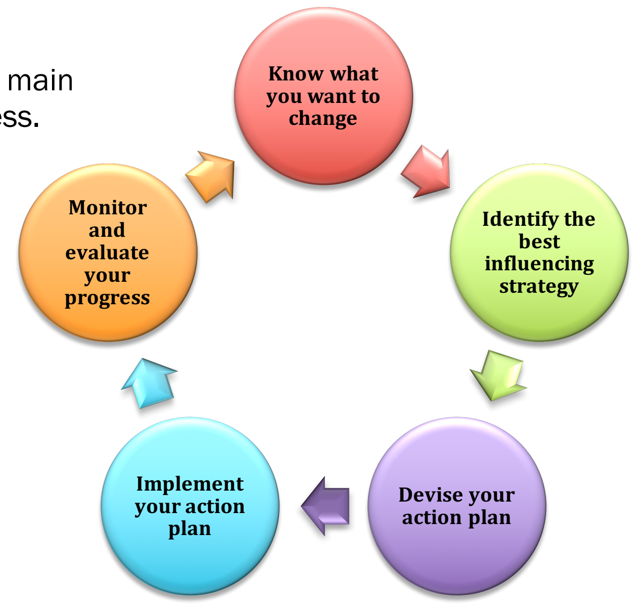
- If the advocacy is influencing **people** (whether named individuals or types of people), advocacy objectives can only be expressed as changes in their **knowledge**, **skills**, **attitudes** or **behaviours.**

If an objective can't be written in terms of changes in policy, practice, knowledge, skills, attitudes or behaviour, then it isn't an objective. If you have a long list of objectives, they aren't really objectives – they are recommendations. An objective is what you want to achieve with the resources you are expending: it's not the same as what you are publicly calling for.

What is this guide for?

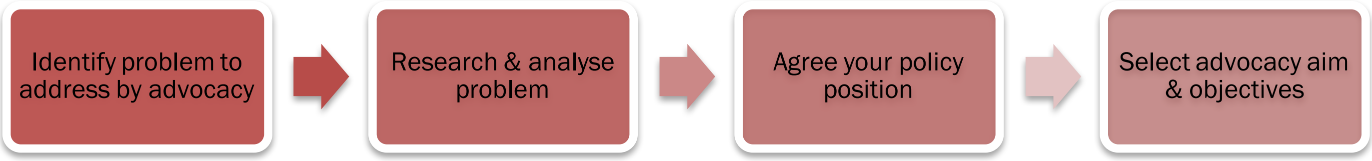
The Advocacy & Campaigning Cycle sets out five main **phases** for the advocacy and campaigning process. These phases are fundamental and would apply to any advocacy project, no matter how large or small or the time available for planning and implementation.

This Mini-Guide covers the first phase: **Know what you want to change.** It describes the steps, processes and tools that enable you to efficiently and effectively identify your aim, recommendations and objectives.



The Planning Pathway: Know what you want to change

Four distinct steps are involved in the process of knowing what you want to change:



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. The amount of time and effort that is put into each step depends on your starting point, how ambitious your goals are, the time and resources available, and the level of consensus within your group.

1. Identify the problem to address through advocacy

This step may be obvious – there is a specific problem that has brought you together and driven you to campaign. For some organisations and individuals, however, the range of problems in the world can be overwhelming, making it hard to focus on any particular aspect (advocacy is usually easier and more effective if focussed onto specific problems).

The problem should be expressed in terms of how it is experienced by people, animals or nature – not as a policy problem (which may be one of the causes of the core problem, but probably not the only one).

Organisations that need to choose between several problems need to apply some criteria to help identify the best choice. The actual criteria will depend on the type of organisation, but they could fall under the headings of RIPE:

- **R**elevance of the problem to the organisation
- **I**mportance of the problem (scale and severity)
- **P**otential for change
- **E**mpowering for those involved

Where possible and relevant, affected communities should identify and/or endorse the choice of advocacy issue – *"Not about us without us!"*

2. Research and analyse problem

The problems we want to tackle are usually complex, so before we can say with any confidence (and credibility) what the solutions are, we need to understand the various causes of the problem and its effects. To do this, we need to collect relevant information and analyse it.

Note that although at this stage we are mainly concerned with information that will guide our analysis, we may also need to use that information as evidence to help convince others when we implement our advocacy plan. The information gathered through research can be either **quantitative** (involving numerical data, often comparing different groups or trends over time, documenting how funding is spent, etc.) or **qualitative** (descriptive, usually through written and spoken words and photographs). Both types of information can help us to understand the situation and both can be used as evidence.

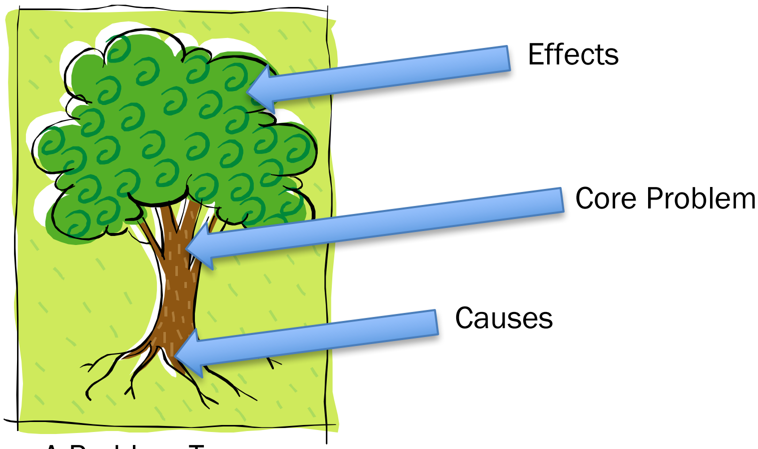
Start with some **desk research** to find out and gather what information from credible sources is already available. Hopefully this will give you enough to undertaken your analysis. If there are some significant gaps in the available data, you may need to undertake or commission some new **primary research**. This can include:

- Operational data (eg, counting users of a particular service)
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Interviews (one-to-one or group interviews)
- Case studies (based on interviews, photographs and videos)

You then need to analyse the research information in a way that enables you to be comprehensive and objective when identifying the causes and effects of a problem and its potential solutions.

Doing this in a small group using some participatory mapping tools can help develop a shared analysis. Suitable tools include:

- Systems Mapping
- Problem & Solution Trees
- Force-Field Analysis



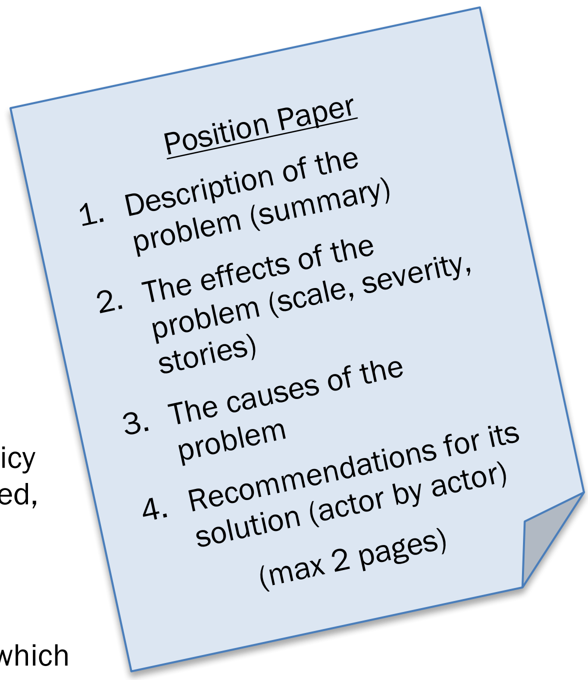
A Problem Tree

Where possible, your analysis should be based on a process of **Participatory Research and Analysis** (PRA), where people affected by the issue are supported to gather the evidence and undertake the analysis themselves, rather than just being treated as 'research subjects' in an extractive research exercise. Affected people provide one of the key voices in the process of analysing the problem. It is too easy for outsiders to make wrong assumptions about the causes and effects of issues affecting others. There are a range of different participatory tools and methodologies available.

3. Agree your policy position

Your analysis of the problem needs to be documented and adopted by your group, organisation or network. This agreed analysis then forms the basis of your campaign, ensuring that everyone understands the position and messages are coherent. The usual format for such documentation is a Position Paper.

Position Papers should normally be no more than two pages long. Keeping Position Papers brief forces the writer to be clear and focussed, making it easier for colleagues to understand the position and for them to be formally agreed. However, they can reference other more detailed research papers that support their conclusions.



They describe the problem and its effects, your diagnosis of its causes and your **recommendations** for its cure – the actions that different actors need to take to resolve the problem.

The main audience for a Position Paper is internal. It is a tool to help get formal agreement on what your organisational policy position is on an issue. Once that agreement has been reached, the Position Paper is then a tool to communicate that policy position to staff and volunteers so that they are able to represent it to their external audiences.

Position Papers are not to be confused with Policy Briefings, which are documents written to explain your policy position to an external audience. Although they will say similar things, they will be written in a different style.

At some point, you may also want to publish a more in-depth report based on your research and analysis, but organisational policy should still be based on a clear and concise internal position paper.

4. Select advocacy aim and objectives

The recommendations that you have set out in your agreed position paper are likely to relate to many different actors. While you should continue to reference that broad analysis in your advocacy, to be effective you should select a small number of recommendations (possibly just one) to be your advocacy objectives.

You should select the recommendation on the basis of what is most strategically appropriate in your current context. You could chose:

- The most important one (*the big hitter*)
- The easiest one (*the low hanging fruit*)
- The timeliest one (*the ripe fruit*)
- The one that needs to happen first to enable the others to happen (*the key*)
- The one that is easiest to explain (*the crystal*)
- The one that is most emotive (*the heart puller*)
- The one that no one else is addressing *(the orphan)*

Whichever recommendation you chose to be your advocacy objective, it is important you understand why you have chosen it.

Objectives should be written as outcomes not activities, and made SMART:

- **S**pecific – what exactly is the change and who has to make it?
- **M**easurable – will you know if it has been achieved?
- **A**chievable – can be ambitious but has to be achievable to justify resources being spent on it
- **R**elevant – will it make a significant contribution to the aim?
- **T**ime-bound – over what time period will you work on it?

Once you are clear on your aim, policy position and objectives, you can move on to the next phases of the Advocacy & Campaigning Cycle: Identify the Best Influencing Strategy.

This is #2 of a series of Advocacy & Campaigning Guides written by Ian Chandler. It should be read alongside Guide #1 *"Advocacy & Campaigning – an overview"*, which puts it in a strategic context.

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

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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
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