

Steps for advancing local policy

1. Develop a good strategy

- *Develop Policy Goals*
In developing policy goals, it is important to think clearly about what strategy is most likely to succeed. This decision-making process should include consideration of whether an initiative is likely to pass, given the current political climate; what the cost of a campaign to pass the initiative would be (both in terms of time and resources); and how difficult a policy will be to implement or enforce.
- *Develop a sound political foundation for a campaign to advance local policy change.*
Once practitioners have identified clear objectives for policy change, they must formulate a strategy for mobilizing support and galvanizing the political will necessary to ensure its adoption by decision-makers. Part of this process involves identifying individuals and stakeholder groups who are affected by or are interested in a particular problem.
- *Thoroughly evaluate the potential impact of lobbying activities on your organization.*
Both government and non-government organizations need to consider the potential implications of embarking on a campaign for policy change. Government organizations and those non-profit organizations with substantial government or corporate funding should consider the fiscal implications of advocacy work. For example, before advocating for policy change around an issue that is highly controversial, an organization should consider whether these types of activities could jeopardize any of its funding sources. In addition, government organizations or government-funded organizations may be specifically banned from engaging in any type of activity surrounding certain issues (i.e. family planning).
- *Framing the Need for Change*
The way that a problem is defined affects what solutions will be proposed to address it. Narrow problem definitions are more likely to persuade policy makers to follow a specific course of action. Depending on the desired outcome, advocates may want to examine how they define the problem at

hand. Additionally, advocates are more likely get policy-makers' attention if they not only point out a problem, but also articulate a realistic solution.

2. Provide evidence for your case

- *Back up Ideas with Research*
Research is an important starting point for any policy intervention. Once a policy issue has been targeted for change, advocates need enough background information to determine the most realistic strategy for mitigating the problem. Data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau, city and county needs assessments, school districts, community based organizations, and academic research can help describe the extent of a problem. More descriptive information can be gathered from community surveys, community forums, and focus groups to document how community members feel about the problem, and what they believe should be done.
- *Calculate the Monetary Costs Associated with Inaction*
Advocates should develop an estimate of the long-term economic and social costs related to inaction and compare these figures with the projected cost of moving forward with policy change. Reframing local policy solutions in terms of potential savings may help convince key decision makers that action is warranted.
- *Use the Media to Educate the Public and Decision-Makers*
The media bring attention to specific issues and can be used to set the agenda for public debate and policy change. Advocates can advance their policy objectives through the use of media advocacy, a technique for harnessing the power of the media to promote social change. Effective media advocacy requires careful planning, and adherence to several key principles. These include: monitoring the media for stories related to a particular issue; setting media objectives that are aligned with overall policy objectives; understanding the needs of journalists, and maintaining credibility.

3. Design for success

- *Identify the Branches of Local Government to be Targeted by a Campaign*
In developing policy goals, it is important to consider how an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the three branches of local government can inform strategy. The legislative and executive branches of government are the two branches most frequently targeted by policy practitioners. Prevention practitioners can utilize their understanding of government operation to determine which branch of government they need to target in order to obtain desired local policy changes.

- *Analyze and Understand the Processes of Local Power Structures*
The specific processes and players of local-level policy-making vary by location. Certain key elements distinguish local policy-making from similar efforts at the state and federal level. For example, the exact relationship between the legislative and executive branches of government varies by locality depending upon the structure of the city or county government. Practitioners must identify which institutions and key-players are responsible for making the decisions in the targeted policy area, and then learn how these institutions determinate policy.
- *Plan to Evaluate Policy Impact and Disseminate Results*
An impact evaluation assesses changes in the well-being of individuals that can be attributed to a particular program or policy. Information generated by impact evaluations informs decisions on whether to expand, modify, or eliminate a particular policy or program and can help other localities prioritize public actions. In addition, the results of impact evaluations can provide a powerful argument for expanding a particular policy, especially where it helps quantify the savings resulting from the policy in relationship to the cost of implementation. This information is critical to the field of primary prevention, where very little data exists on the relationship between environment-focused policies on prevention and improved health outcomes.

4. Develop Key Partners

- *Develop Local Partnerships and Coalitions to Increase Power*
Partnerships focus on the process of building relationships between different community sectors as a way of encouraging unexpected solutions to community problems. Coalitions bring together diverse people and organizations to achieve shared goals. They can offer numerous advantages over working independently, providing a way to handle complex issues in a time of scarce financial resources and support. Coalitions can also take on broad concerns that individual organizations may not be able to address on their own. Examples of coalition activities that are likely to be effective include: sharing information among members; working for a common goal; bringing attention to a problem, or coordinating services.
- *Foster Statewide Networks of Local Policy Coalitions*
Partnerships with groups from other localities that are pursuing similar local policy goals can be critical to combating efforts by powerful industries to preempt local ordinances with statewide legislation. State preemption is a real threat to cutting-edge local policy initiatives because industries, which do not

have the ability to prevent localities from enacting tough ordinances, do have an army of lobbyists in the state capitol. Thus, an industry-sponsored state law can quickly nullify communities' hard-won efforts. One way of combating this threat is by developing partnerships and maintaining contacts with local coalitions in other areas of the state, which are fighting to enact similar local ordinances. A strong network of local policy coalitions has a much better chance of defeating industry attempts to preempt local ordinances with statewide legislations. The consequences of failing to pursue this type of strategy are evident in the efforts of California's communities to limit alcohol sales.