Building Advocacy Capacity

Developing A Policy Advocacy Program For Your Organization

NESAWG

The Northeast Sustainable Working Group

Table of Contents

Introduction

What is Policy Advocacy?

Policy advocacy is a set of activities—including but not limited to lobbying—that seek to influence public policy on behalf of a constituency.

Why Build Advocacy Capacity?

- *Why public policy is important:* Public policies shape our world. They direct behavior and resources. Public policies can further or undermine the vision we seek. Public policy is one of the most powerful arenas for action by grassroots groups and citizens. Public policies—from local farm stand regulations to major federal legislation such as the Farm Bill and the Child Nutrition Act—inform how dollars are allocated, what actions are permitted or rewarded, and what social norms are encouraged.
- *Why policy advocacy is important:* Policy advocacy embraces a range of activities, all of which strive to shape or redirect policies toward desired goals. Engaging in policy advocacy is one of the most direct and effective ways citizens have of holding elected officials accountable to the public interest and revitalizing our democracy.

  Despite the bad rap that "policy work" has—it's complicated, arcane, deadly, or useless—the opposite is true. Advocating for better public policies can be manageable, exciting and rewarding—and all policies can be influenced by citizen groups and individuals.
- *Why building your organization's advocacy capacity is important:* Organizations are powerful vehicles for change. They can speak for their constituencies as well as mobilize them. Organizations working together in coalitions and networks have made substantial gains in farm and food policy over the last two decades. Regardless of their size or budget, all organizations have the ability to engage in meaningful advocacy activities.

Many grassroots groups want to be more involved in public policy advocacy as organizations and by engaging their members and constituents. All too often, however, these groups are not sure about how to begin, what they can legally do, what issues and activities would best serve their interests, or how best to work with other organizations and coalitions.

Our goal is to help groups incorporate policy advocacy activities into their work in ways that serve their mission, promote constructive dialogue on issues, increase their organizational impact and inspire their constituents' civic engagement.

About this Handbook:

- *Does your organization want to get more involved in public policy advocacy?*
- *Would you like to have a greater policy impact at the local, state or national level?*
- *Would your board and staff like to get clearer on your policy priorities and activity options?*

If you answered yes to any of these questions, this Handbook is for you. This Handbook will help your organization become more effective in your policy advocacy work. It gives you information and a process for your group to make decisions about policy advocacy activities.

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This Handbook will help you:

- Understand terms and concepts about policy advocacy;
- Clarify your advocacy objectives;
- Create participatory processes for addressing issues;
- Develop a concrete plan to participate effectively in chosen advocacy arenas; and
- Engage your members and constituents, leading to direct citizen action.

Background

For over 15 years, NESAWG has supported its member groups as they work to change our region's farm and food system. Members' outstanding efforts have reached from farm fields to neighborhood groceries to the U.S. Congress. And yet, it seemed possible—and imperative—to increase our impact even more. Some organizations were reluctant to engage in advocacy while others didn't know quite how to "do it." They were not capitalizing on the huge amount of good will embodied in their constituents.

In 2006 NESAWG developed a policy advocacy training curriculum and conducted a series of trainings with member groups across the Northeast region. Based on their success, NESAWG concluded that other groups could benefit from the basic curriculum and resources, whether or not they were able to engage in face-to-face training.

What we learned

Much of what we learned in conducting these trainings has been captured and refined in this Handbook. We found that organizations benefit most from the training when they:

- Have a grassroots orientation;
- Bring various sectors' interests to the table;
- Demonstrate a commitment to diversity; and
- Possess accountable governance and dedication to leadership development.

We also gained insights directly from participants, who gave us feedback on what they found most valuable. Groups consistently found it very useful to:

- Create an opportunity to discuss policy advocacy among both Board and staff;
- Engage in facilitated conversation with sufficient time to talk through the issues;
- Understand as a group the different policy advocacy actions; and
- Articulate the group's internal process for how policy issues emerge and are dealt.

NESAWG continues to be available to work with groups interested in building advocacy capacity. We can offer an intensive half- or full-day training session—working with you in advance to prepare and tailor the training to your needs. We could also provide follow-up support services identified through the training process.

About NESAWG

Founded in 1992, NESAWG is a network of organizations and individuals seeking a more sustainable and secure regional food and farm system. NESAWG's activities include public policy development and advocacy, public education, food system development, and member capacity building. The NESAWG region includes 12 states, from Maine to West Virginia. For more information and to get involved, visit www.nesawg.org or our new social networking site, www.nefood.org.

Acknowledgments

Northeast Midwest Institute; W.K. Kellogg Foundation; Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation, Lawson Valentine Foundation; and pilot trainees: CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture), The Food Project, Heifer Project International-Northeast Regional Office, Just Food, New Immigrant Farming Initiative, and the Northeast Organic Farming Association Interstate Council.

Engaging Your Organization: Issues and Approaches

The impetus for an organization to clarify whether and/or how it will engage in policy advocacy varies. A few of the common motivations are:

a) The need to respond to a request from a partner or allied organization to take action.

b) A history of unresolved discussions around what the organization can or should do in the policy advocacy arena.

c) Pressure from the organization's members or constituencies to take a stand on an issue.

d) A local, state or federal policy opportunity emerges that the organization could clearly influence in a positive direction—if it had an established protocol for engaging in advocacy.

Whatever the impetus, the most effective method for getting to greater clarity and shared purpose is a well-planned, face-to-face discussion. Although technology allows for many kinds of communication over time and distance, nothing can take the place of meeting in person to address this topic.

Groups that undertake such in-depth dialogues often benefit from engaging an outside facilitator so that all the assembled stakeholders can participate fully in the discussion, rather than bear the burden of running the meeting. NESAWG can tailor these materials to the specific needs of organizations, and would be happy to work with your group if you choose to convene a policy advocacy meeting.

Let's assume that you are convinced it is important for your organization to discuss and learn about policy advocacy—and perhaps become more engaged in it. This Handbook walks you through an interactive process—a series of meetings resulting in a set of decisions suited to your organization.

Consider Who Needs to be at the Table

Options include:

- Board members
- Board and staff
- Board, staff and key stakeholders/constituents/members
- Hired consultant or designated in-house facilitator

One way to determine who needs to be at the table is to imagine the organization engaging in a couple of specific policy advocacy activities (described below) and then thinking through an accountability matrix.

Who initiates?	Who is consulted?	Who has to sign off?	What one person is accountable?

This simple exercise can provide a clear indication of who needs to present or at least well represented in the organization's policy advocacy deliberations. In many cases, a mix of board and staff is the most effective.

Get the Initial Questions Right

To confirm interest, jumpstart the thinking, and tailor the discussion, begin with a description of the conversation you envision. Offer an invitation to join in, and perhaps a brief survey to focus responses. This "pre-discussion" can be initiated via email, through your group's newsletter, or on your website, blog or social networking site.

At this stage, ask big picture, open-ended questions to elicit broad thinking about possible goals and approaches to policy advocacy. Include questions and concerns you'll want to address during the training. Guiding Questions could include:

Organizational Goals

- What do you hope will have changed for our organization and/or stakeholders as a result of this work?

Current status

- What are our organization's mission and programs and how do they relate to policy work?
- Where is our organization now in terms of policy advocacy? (Respondents will have different understandings of "policy advocacy" at this point; that's okay.)

Moving forward

- How do you envision moving forward?
- Who do you see at the table?
- What additional questions and/or concerns do you have?

Do Your Homework in Advance

Now you've got some interested people, and some initial feedback. At this point in the process it's beneficial to prepare participants with some homework. Most importantly, give participants a chance to review the terms that will provide the foundation for all the following discussion. Send Information Sheets 2-6 (pages17-23) after your survey results are in, and at least one week before your first meeting.

Organize Your Meeting

Deciding whether and how to engage in policy advocacy takes a commitment of time and attention. But the rewards are significant and you will find that the process itself is empowering for your organization. The materials in this Handbook were developed by NESAWG to accompany the advocacy trainings it facilitated. You may use or modify the training agenda included here on pages 15-16.

Scoping out the Policy Advocacy Arena

Examine the role of public policy & why policy advocacy is important

In large measure, public policies shape our world—they direct behavior and resources and can further or undermine the vision we seek. All public policy—from local farm stand regulations to major federal legislation such as the Farm Bill and the Child Nutrition Act—can be influenced by citizen groups and individuals.

Engaging in policy advocacy is one of the most direct and effective ways citizens have of holding public officials accountable to the public interest and revitalizing our democracy.

In the arena of sustainable and just food systems, policy has played a vital in providing funding, competitive grants, research, training, technical assistance and a wide range of programs that have a direct, daily impact on our organizations and constituents. Whether your organization focuses on food and agriculture systems as a whole or on more specific issues, public policy has influence on your work—for better or worse. We've all had the experience of running up against wrong-headed policies that make it nearly impossible to further our goals.

Conversely, many groups are grateful for policies and programs—most often won and maintained through unified grassroots advocacy—that help fund and advance our missions. Examples abound, from farmland preservation and enterprise development to food access and water quality, from urban agriculture and renewable energy to fair contracts and school food.

Federal examples from the 2008 Farm Bill, compiled at wwww.healthyfarmbill.org, include:

- Significant new support for farmers' market promotion and development, creation of a Healthy Urban Food Enterprise Development Center, increased financing opportunities for local food entrepreneurs, increased funding for community food projects, and targeted support for rural micro-businesses.
- An overall increase in conservation program and farmland protection funding of more than $5 billion over 10 years and a new cooperative conservation partnership empowering local communities and farmers to address local and regional environmental needs.
- More than $80 million in increased funding for organic agriculture research, certification cost-share, and related programs, plus a new conservation program to provide training and financial support for farmers making the transition to organic practices.
- Significant outreach, accountability, and regulatory reforms to increase participation and improve access of beginning and socially disadvantaged producers to conservation, credit, and other federal farm programs, as well as $150 million over four years in targeted funding.
- Several important provisions that improve the fairness of agricultural production contracts that increase the competitiveness and transparency of livestock markets.

Check NESAWG's Northeast User Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill for a description of programs of importance to the Northeast, along with guidance for how to get involved.

If you're looking for examples closer to home, NESAWG has inventoried innovative and model state policies and programs in the area of farm viability, market development and promotion, and farmland preservation, land use and conservation in twelve Northeast states. More recently, five special issues of NESAWG's newsletters highlight policy innovations in Northeast states in five topic areas: Integrating agriculture and economic development; Farmland affordability; Institutional procurement; Food processing and licensing; and Dairy. (http://www.nesawg.org/2006/08/publications.html#Special_Edition_Northeast_Policy_Newsletters_).

Articulate What's At Stake—Reasons to Engage

Even if they've come to understand the role and importance of public policy and advocacy, many groups find it necessary to make the case for engaging the organization and/or its members in advocacy. It may be that Board members need to be convinced it is a worthwhile, legal use of organizational time and funds. Or staff may find that constituents want to understand why they would use any of their limited time working beyond the local community where their efforts are already focused and bearing fruit. Whatever the situation, it can be helpful to have some persuasive bullet points tailored to fit your particular needs. Below are some arguments we have used or heard over the years, framing the issues in a variety of ways. You can also refer to the Information sheet on page 25 to see examples culled from food systems and public interest advocates urging both organizations and individuals to engage in policy advocacy.

Overarching frames: What's at stake:

- Our democracy itself. Too many fundamental decisions are being made for us.
- Democracy: use it or lose it
- Equity, justice and self-determination: This is about who decides, who benefits and who pays for policies and funding streams ostensibly designed to serve the public interest.
- All stakeholders should have a place at the table with a voice in making life and death decisions about who has access to what kind of food, at what price, and at what cost to human dignity and the health and well-being of people, plants, animals and entire ecosystems now and into the future.

Role of Policy & Public Funding

- Bad policy helped get us here; good policy can move us in a better direction.
    - *Give examples that resonate with your constituencies. E.g. corn subsidies that encourage overproduction and consumption of high fructose corn syrup vs. Farmers Market Nutrition Programs that provide people in low-income communities with nutritious farm products and farmers with viable markets.*
- It's our money: $10-$30 billion/year in taxpayer dollars is going out the door just in federal food & agriculture programs. We literally can't afford not to be involved.

Values

- Those closest to the problems and the solutions must have a say if public policies are to be practical, effective and equitable and truly serve the public interest.
- The energy, excitement, innovation, personal investment and tangible, visible results are all strongest at the individual and community level. All of that can and must be translated into policies that work at local, state, national and international levels.

Efficacy & Ability

- Citizen action works, there are scores of examples.
- Advocacy can be easy and effective without taking up a lot of time.
- You do not have to be an expert. Just be yourself – a concerned citizen who believes strongly that food and farm policy and your tax dollars can and must work for people and the land.

Bottom line. Public policy has played a huge role in shaping our current food, agriculture and economic systems. If you're working in this arena there are policies that can help or hinder your work, **and** your organization can be an effective player in shaping and funding more policies that further your work while dismantling those that stymie progress.

Understand Concepts and Terms

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of coming to a shared understanding of terms and concepts as your organization thinks through whether and how it wants to incorporate policy advocacy into its work. Many of the groups we worked with had struggled in unproductive discussions for months, sometimes years, in large part because they were talking apples and oranges and were unclear about which terms are clearly defined by law and which are used in often muddled and confusing ways.

Categories of Advocacy. In this Handbook, we distinguish among three categories of advocacy—public education, persuasion, and lobbying.

- ***Public Education activities*** are intended to inform your organization's staff, board, members, constituency and/or the general public about a public policy issue. Your goal is educational and your position is neutral. Public education activities can include forums, workshops, trainings, and newsletter articles.

Your organization may want people to know about a particular subject, but not be in a position to advocate for a particular position. The subject may be controversial or you may not have agreement among board or staff members. For example, you may want your community to know more about genetically modified crops. You could sponsor a debate or forum at which various points of view can be expressed and materials disseminated.

The subject can be a specific topic such as farmland easements, or thematic such as land use and agriculture. With a good organizational process, the selected topic(s) and activities will fit into your organization's overall advocacy framework. (See information sheets on Policy Advocacy Activities page 17, and Public Education pages 18-19)

- ***Persuasion activities*** are intended to influence behavior. Your organization has a point of view; it is not neutral. You want to promote a position or perspective. You want to urge action by members, constituents and/or the public. Persuasion activities include: sign-on letters, organizing meetings, events, talking to legislators and their staff (except for urging specific action on legislation) letters to the editor, op eds etc.

For example, your organization wants to encourage public policies that provide incentives for supermarkets to locate in under-served areas. You could host a meeting for community members and state legislators to explore opportunities. You could build a coalition with other groups that might have similar interests, research policy models from elsewhere, and suggest promising actions.

These types of efforts actively engage your organization in the policy arena, but are not considered lobbying. They are permitted to 501(c)(3) organizations by law. They not only inform your constituency, but also encourage them to get involved. A huge amount of effective policy change work is done through persuasion, especially when groups organize together. (See Advocacy Persuasion Information sheet page 20)

- ***Lobbying activities*** are specific actions defined by law. Contrary to widely held misconceptions, a range of lobbying activities by nonprofit organizations is permitted and protected by U.S. law. See Information sheets on pages 21-23 for detailed description of what constitutes lobbying and what restrictions are placed on nonprofits. Generally, direct lobbying means urging action on a particular piece of legislation, or, in the case of "grassroots lobbying", urging the public to urge such action. Activities can include initiating a sign-on letter or action alert to urge passage of specific legislation, signing onto such a letter, or direct communication with legislator about specific legislation.

Assess Costs and Benefits

Organizational Baseline: It is vital to revisit the data you gathered at the beginning of this process. (See: Get the Initial Questions Right page 6) It's often the case that Board members, managing staff and program/field staff have differing views and different information about the organization's activities. You may be surprised at how rich a discussion can ensue, which can inform a more comprehensive approach to advocacy and foster clearer channels of communication and decision-making.

It is also helpful to ground your discussions in a review of your vision, mission and goals statement (be sure to have one available!), as you'll often find that policy advocacy helps to bridge the gap between a huge vision, ambitious mission and the more focused day-to-day activities of the organization.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

Before launching into policy advocacy, it is important for your organization to explore both benefits and costs. While there are many possible levels of engagement in advocacy, which we explore elsewhere, it is critical to have the discussion before deciding on any particular set of policy priorities or advocacy strategies.

Guiding Questions could include:

- What are the opportunities, and implications for non-profit organizations?
- What are possible pitfalls?
- What restrictions do nonprofits need to be aware of?
  - Note: this is addressed in the suggested"homework" materials. See Information sheet on pages 22-23, Lobbying Dos and Don'ts.

The kinds of things that tend to come up in such conversation include:

Benefits:

- Higher visibility
- More comprehensive approach to achieving organizational mission
- Sense of contributing to larger systems change
- New allies

Costs/Pitfalls:

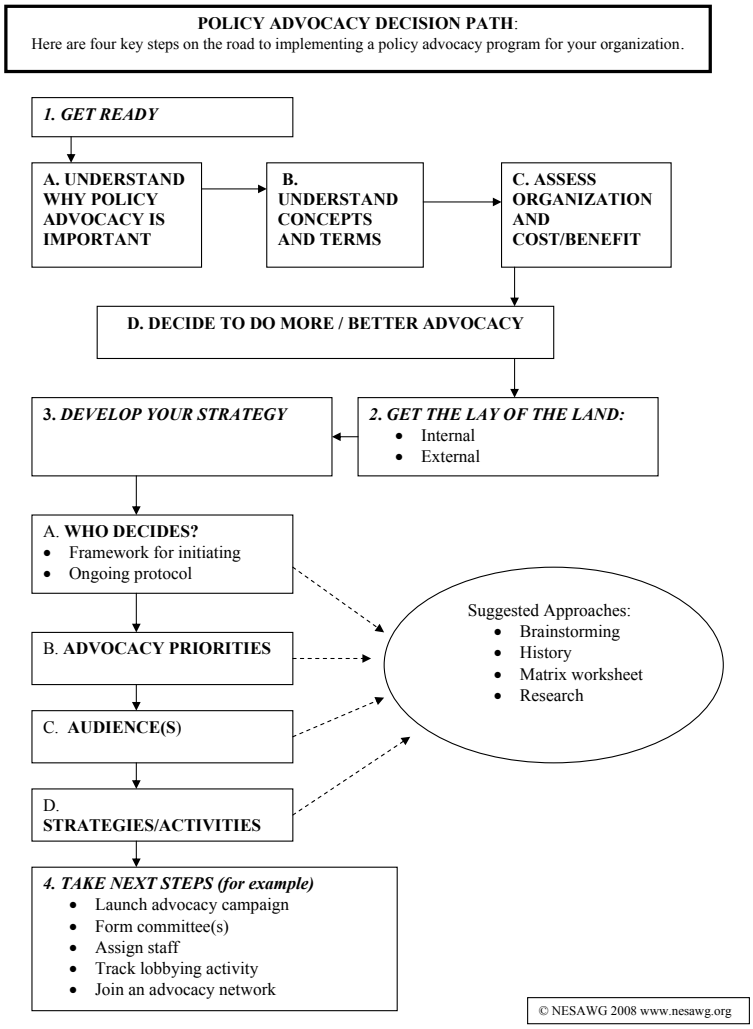
- Time and energy
- Possible divisiveness
- Developing process and priorities for an organization taking positions
- Can be difficult to fund
- Challenging to measure success

It can be quite valuable to air any other concerns so that they can be openly acknowledged and addressed as you develop your advocacy work.

Policy Advocacy Decision Path

This decision flow chart can help you track your progress toward an effective policy advocacy "game plan."

If you're looking for examples closer to home, NESAWG has inventoried innovative and model state policies and programs in the area of farm viability, market development and promotion, and farmland preservation, land use and conservation in twelve Northeast states. More recently, five special issues of NESAWG's newsletters highlight policy innovations in Northeast states in five topic areas: Integrating agriculture and economic development; Farmland affordability; Institutional procurement; Food processing and licensing; and Dairy. (http://www.nesawg.org/2006/08/publications.html#Special_Edition_Northeast_Policy_Newsletters_).



If you've gotten this far, you've learned why policy advocacy in the food and farming arena is important (A). You've gotten the basics about policy advocacy terms and kinds of activities and understand that we are talking about many more options besides lobbying (B).

You've done an organizational scan to clarify where you are regarding policy advocacy (C), and decided that you want to be more effective in the advocacy arena (D). For some organizations, this means starting new; for others it means developing a better process for doing advocacy work.

Now come the next steps: getting the lay of the land – internal and external, and developing your strategy.

Get the Lay of the Land

This can be accomplished quite quickly and easily in your meeting, provided you have a good cross-section of Board, management, staff and perhaps a few key stakeholders. Generally a group brainstorm of the following three arenas yields a lot of information quickly, that can be refined in text or diagrams at a later time.

Guiding Questions could include:

- Where does policy advocacy fit within our existing or planned programs?
- Where does policy advocacy fit with our partner organizations?
- Where does policy advocacy fit within local, state, national and/or international collaborative efforts?

Develop Your Strategy

What does it mean to take a position? You're either for something or against it, right? Not always so simple. For an organization, taking a position can be complicated and tricky. Who is taking the position? The board? The staff? The members? On whose behalf? How does the organization reach the decision? Is it by vote or consensus? How informed to the decision-makers need to be about the issue?

How involved must we be? Can we be? The possible levels of engagement are many. Which means that your organization can choose how it can most effectively engage in policy advocacy activities based on capacity, interest, timing, and strategic analysis (who else is doing what, what you can add to the effort).

One on end, you can simply pass along information about policy topics and happenings in your meetings, newsletters or list serves. This is not unimportant. Better informed, your audiences will be better able to engage in meaningful and possibly influential dialogue and take action in other venues.

On the other end, you can take the lead in a policy campaign by organizing groups and actions, and lobbying to your legal limit. Actions on either end, or anywhere in between are valuable and important. They all contribute to change and to engagement—our ultimate goals.

How do we decide? That's the point of this Handbook—to help your organization make decisions about conducting policy advocacy. The policy landscape is huge, so it can feel daunting to figure out where to begin, or where to hang your organization's hat.

NESAWG embraces a food and farm systems framework. This implies that all aspects of food and agriculture are connected and important. The farm and food system includes all the components—producers, inputs, markets, consumers, researchers, landowners, economic development, conservation, and so on. It also includes every level, from neighborhood to global. Geography is important. People resonate to a sense of place, whether it's their local farm or our warming planet.

You may focus on getting better food into corner bodegas, regional food value chains, or international farmworker rights. It's all part of a whole—one that is broken and needs to change. By picking your corner—your issues, your geographic focus—your organization will help change the whole system.

Start small and build from there One way to start determining your decision-making processes is to use your meeting to brainstorm and then narrow down a set of potential policy priorities (suggestions below). You can then match these potential policy priorities with what feel like the most appropriate and manageable advocacy activities/levels of engagement (Schematic, page 17). You can then apply the Accountability Matrix (page 5) to these priorities and levels of engagement to get a sense of who needs to be part of the decision-making process in each case.

It can be useful to think in terms of scenarios. For example,

An alert comes in from a partner organization on an already-identified policy priority…

Before circulating it more widely, does staff have to check with the Board? The ED?

What if it's on a topic of interest, but not an agreed priority of the organization?

An organization is asked to sign on to a letter to Congress…

Again, if it's an agreed priority, does the ED have to check with the Board?

If there's a mix of issues, does the ED have to check with Board, staff or key stakeholders to gauge potential controversy? What are the mechanisms for doing so?

Select policy priorities

Getting a better handle on the whole universe of potential policy topics you could work on—and then narrowing that down too something more manageable—is a good way to use some of your face-to-face training time.

You could start with a small or large group brainstorming session on three key questions:

1. What should our top 3 policy advocacy goals be?
2. What are our priority policy issues?
3. Who are our primary audiences?

To get at the reasoning behind people's choices—especially if you're working in small groups—you can use the "Why? Why? Why?" technique. This simply means, for example, asking question #1 above: What do you think our organization's top 3 policy advocacy goals should be? Whatever the person answers, you ask them why. And whatever their subsequent response is, you ask them why again. And so forth.

You can also simply list and then cluster all the responses from a large group brainstorm on flipcharts or sticky walls.

The next step is to begin assessing and sifting out from all the possibilities a small number that it makes sense to start with. One tool for doing this is the Policy Prioritizing Criteria Matrix you'll find on page 27.

In your meeting you should allow sufficient time to introduce this tool, and have the group walk through one or two top issues from the list you've generated to get a sense of how it works. You may also want to discuss weighting and/or adding criteria to fit your organization's specific needs. Even a very quick run-through with the matrix may highlight significant areas where you need to do more research, fact finding or coalition building to even consider taking something on.

If you're just starting out in the policy advocacy realm, you may want to consider limiting your initial priorities to just one or two that you can work on and gain experience with before considering more.

Determine your audience(s) & select strategies and activities

There are many approaches to identifying key audiences and developing a policy advocacy strategy. The Institute for Sustainable Communities Advocacy & Leadership Center has an excellent strategy-planning tool, adapted from work by Jim Schultz of the Democracy Center (Information sheet pages 28-29) . We recommend you make this available to everyone at your meeting, as it is likely that different subgroups will take the lead in identifying key audiences and strategies for the different policy priorities you select.

TAKE NEXT STEPS!

Congratulations. If you have followed the steps outlined in this Handbook, you have:

- Gained understanding of terms and concepts about policy advocacy;
- Clarified your advocacy objectives;
- Created participatory processes for addressing issues; and

Now you're ready to develop a concrete plan to participate effectively in chosen advocacy arenas.

As we all know, the best discussion in the world won't go very far unless you spend some time agreeing on what needs to be done, who will do it, and when.

There are various ways to approach this. Again, try to start small and incremental, so you can build from little successes, rather than getting overwhelmed with plans you simply don't yet have the capacity to implement.

For example, you could:

- Create a public issues education committee that makes recommendations to your Board
- Write an educational or persuasive article for your newsletter or blog that makes clear policy connections
- Make staff assignments for specific research
- Look into upcoming opportunities to participate in policy advocacy led by another group
- Design a policy advocacy campaign (à la The Nine Questions, pages 28-29)
- Make a system for tracking your lobbying activities
- Join an advocacy network

Whatever you decide to do, it will be an important contribution to social change. It will be a comfortable fit for your organization, and use its resources most effectively. Remember too, that policy advocacy can be a very rewarding, empowering way to involve your membership in your ongoing work.

Good luck!

Northeast Sustainable Ag. Working Group (NESAWG)

BUILDING ADVOCACY CAPACITY

Policy Advocacy Training Agenda

4 Hours

5:00 – 5:10 p.m. **Overview & Introductions**

5:10 – 5:20 p.m. **Why Policy Advocacy is Important** *(10 minutes)*

- What is at stake, why people care, what can be achieved
- Role of policy & legislation in the food and agriculture sector
- Food & Ag Policy: what has changed, what has worked, what does it take, what are the implications for the movement

5:20 – 5:35 p.m. **Understanding Concepts and Terms—Establishing a Shared Language** *(15 minutes—if prep work has been done)*

- Policy Advocacy is overarching frame for this training
- What is meant by policy education, persuasion and lobbying; what are the differences?
- What policy advocacy is: local bylaws to international
- What kinds of advocacy fall outside: buy local, buy organic, etc.

5:35 – 5:50 p.m. **Organizational Baseline** *(15 minutes—building on prep work)*

- Mission & Programs
- Where is org re: policy education, advocacy and lobbying

5:50 – 6:00 p.m. **Policy Advocacy—What it takes** *(10 minutes)*

- Advocacy can be a number of things (ed, persuasion, lobbying)
- See Policy Advocacy Schematic: each has its own action, decision-making process and investment
- If engaging in legislative arena—consider full-cycle of public policy process

6:00 – 6:15 p.m. **Cost-Benefit Analysis** *(15 minutes—if prep work has been done)*

- What are the opportunities, restrictions and implications for non-profit organizations?
- What does the organization gain through policy advocacy
- What are possible pitfalls and costs?

6:15 – 6:35 p.m. **Lay of the Land & Where Advocacy Fits** *(20 minutes)*

- Org. Programs
- Org. Partners
- Local, State and National Collaborative Advocacy Efforts

6:35 – 7:00 p.m. **Dinner Break** *(25 minutes)*

7:00 – 7:20 p.m. **Policy Advocacy Goals/Priority Issues** *(20 minutes)* *Small group exercise*

- What should our top 3 policy advocacy goals be?
  - Why, why, why?
- Priority Policy Issues?
  - Why, why, why?
- Primary Audiences?
  - Why, why, why?

Full group reports and discussion

7:20 – 7:50 p.m. **Policy Position Decision-Making Process** *(30 minutes)*

- Decision making process for selecting priorities, taking positions, taking action.
- Who's taking positions on whose behalf, who's involved in priority setting, who makes final decisions, how are they communicated to Board, staff, members, funders, etc.). Tool: accountability matrix
- Different processes for different types of advocacy (ed, persuasion, lobbying)

7:50 – 8:15 p.m. **Criteria for Assessing/Selecting Policy Priorities** *(25 minutes) Handout: Policy Prioritizing Criteria/Matrix*

- Brainstorm laundry list
- Cluster
- Choose 1-2 top issues for group to walk through matrix
- Discuss possible weighting of criteria

8:15 – 8:20 p.m. **Developing a Policy Advocacy Campaign** *(5 minutes)*

- Handout, resources

8:20 – 8:50 p.m. **Next Steps. What needs to be done, by whom, when***. (30 minutes)*

- Decision-making processes and players
- Research / fact finding
- Upcoming opportunities
- Select policy priorities
- Craft/launch strategy

8:50 – 9:00 p.m. **Evaluation** *(10 minutes)*

Policy Advocacy

As shown in this schematic, POLICY ADVOCACY can take several forms. An organization may choose public education, persuasion and/or lobbying to meet its advocacy goals. Each has its own types of actions and decision-making process.

POLICY ADVOCACY

Public Education

Purpose/context:

- Educational (internal and external) goal; neutral position
- Topical/thematic
- Consistent with organization's strategic plan/ annual work plan
- Proactive
- Longer timeframe

Actions include: forums, training, newsletter articles, messaging

Examples: bio-fuels; the federal farm bill (general); ag land use

Process (example):

1) Staff/board committee develop criteria against which to select issues
2) Staff chooses issues through annual discussion and vets against criteria
3) Top issues approved by Board
4) Staff/board committee decide activity(ies)
5) Staff/board/committee implements

Persuasion

Purpose/context:

- Has a point of view: promoting a position or perspective
- Urges action on part of members, constituents and/ or public
- Engages organization in policy arena (but not lobbying)
- Consistent with organization's strategic plan

Actions include: sign-on letters; meetings; events; letters to the editor; op eds etc.

Examples: state policy working group; state house Ag Day participation; general farm bill sign-on; farmland preservation

Process (example):

1) Staff/board committee develop criteria against which to select issues
2) Staff vets issue/topic against criteria
3) Staff recommends to board committee
4) Board committee reviews and approves
5) Staff/board/committee implements

Lobbying

Purpose/context:

- Communications to influence specific legislation
- Direct and/or grassroots lobbying
- Proactive or reactive

Actions include: sign-on letters; action alerts; communication to legislator; communication to members

Examples: farm bill sign-on letter; email to members urging them to contact Congress; testimony (uninvited) at hearing on state farmland preservation bill

Process (example):

1) Staff/board committee develops annual broad legislative agenda; board approves
2) Staff vets specific actions/requests against agenda
3) Proposed actions not referenced in agenda reviewed by staff/board committee
4) Staff recommends to board
5) Staff or board implements

NOTE: Direct lobbying for organization's program/ funds may be permitted by board without additional review and approval.

Advocacy

Public Education

In this Handbook, we distinguish among three types of advocacy—public education, persuasion, and lobbying (see pages 9 and 17).

One model for Public Education is what the Extension Services have called Public Issues Education or PIE. Groups may find the articulation of these concepts principles to be a valuable reference when developing their own advocacy strategies and priorities.

Public Issues
are matters of widespread concern that frequently involve disagreement and controversy arising from differences in interests, beliefs and values. **The central goal of public issues education (PIE)** is to deliver educational programs designed to enhance society's capacity to understand and address public issues.
(http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~extension/community/public_issues_education.php)

The Council for Public Deliberation
is founded on the belief that an active and engaged public is essential to a healthy community. The members of the Council are dedicated to creating opportunities for people to engage in public conversation on civic issues. These conversations enable individuals to act as a public: that is, take responsibility for what is happening in the community, decide on the public interest, and act to create the kind of community they want. Through training moderators, sponsoring public forums, and encouraging public action, the Council seeks to strengthen the practice of democracy in the greater Columbus area.
(http://www.cpdohio.org/aboutcpd.htm)

PIE Core Values *(excerpted from Cornell Cooperative Extension. Site no longer available)*

Successful public issues educators uphold a set of core values that guide them in their work. They believe that...

- Education is a powerful tool for improving the quality of public choices. Different ways of knowing about an issue, including personal stories, life experiences, and scientific research are to be valued.
- Experimentation, improvisation, inquiry, creativity, and continuous learning foster creative, critical thinking and lead to informed, competent decisions.
- Inclusion ensures that all people with a stake in decisions that affect their lives can contribute to and influence the decision-making process. It balances power and ensures they have equal access to relevant information and the opportunity to participate.
- Civil dialogue among people with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints can enhance the quality of public decisions. When mutual trust and respect are cultivated, such dialogue can occur.
- Innovative solutions often rest on a willingness to negotiate, share power, and explore collaborative action.
- Improving communication and decision-making skills through education enables every person to become involved in public discourse. This may allow for creative, collaborative solutions that previously were not possible.

Objectives & Principles

Public issues education prepares citizens to engage in complex public issues of widespread concern in ways that lead to better-informed decisions. The principle objectives are to:

- Increase citizens' knowledge about issues;
- Assist citizens in determining appropriate and effective strategies for public decision making;
- Help citizens craft, evaluate and implement alternative solutions;
- Build skills and provide opportunities to enhance citizens' effective participation in public decision-making processes.

Accountability & partnerships

- Again, be careful about setting goals and matching activities with objectives you've laid out and the time frame you've set.
- Continuing with the farm-to-school example, your long-term goal may be to increase procurement and use of local/region food throughout your school district.
- However, if you're submitting a one-year planning grant for collaborative farm-to-school policy advocacy, you'll be hard pressed to demonstrate more local food in cafeterias in Year One.
- Acknowledge this and start with more realistic and achievable goals: build relationships, bring stakeholders to the table, establish shared understanding, understand how various groups (food service, non-profits, farmers, distributors, PTAs…) work and where goals and expertise intersect and complement.

Advocacy

Persuasion

In this Handbook, we distinguish among three types of advocacy—public education persuasion, and lobbying (see pages 9 and 17).

Advocacy in the form of *persuasion* is a broad term that refers to efforts to influence opinions, actions and behavior. In this form of advocacy—unlike with public education—your organization has a point of view; it is not neutral.

You want to promote a position or perspective. You want to urge action by members, constituents and/or the public. Persuasion activities that do NOT cross the line into lobbying include: sign-on letters, organizing meetings, events, talking to legislators and their staff (*except* for urging specific action on legislation) letters to the editor, op eds etc.

We have also gleaned from the Web definitions of advocacy that fit the persuasion category:

ad·vo·ca·cy (ād'və-kə-sē) *n.*

1, the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something such as an idea, or a policy. *hafoundation.org/about/glossary/*

2, the active support of an idea or cause etc.; especially the act of pleading or arguing for something. *wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn*

3, a way of advancing a particular point of view.

freespace.virgin.net/john.hewitt1/pg_gloss.htm

4, an umbrella term for organized activism related to a particular set of issues. *en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advocacy*

5, the act of speaking or of disseminating information intended to influence individual behaviour or opinion, corporate conduct or public policy and law. *voluntary-sector.ca/eng/about_us/glossary.cfm*

6, **Advocacy involves representing an organization through articulating the mission and supporting and defending the organization's message.** *www.isa1.com/glossary/a-dgloss.htm*

7, the act or process of defending or maintaining a cause or proposal. **An organization may have advocacy as its mission (or part of its mission) to increase public awareness of a particular issue or set of issues.** *envision.ca/templates/profile.asp*

We highlight the last two definitions to underscore the fact that nonprofit organizations are already, by definition, engaged in advocacy, although they may not be involved in policy advocacy much less lobbying.

Advocacy

Lobbying

In this Handbook, we distinguish among three types of advocacy—public education, persuasion, and lobbying (see pages 9 and 17).

Non-Profit Organizations & 501(h) election

Lobbying activities are specific actions defined by U.S. law. Contrary to widely held misconceptions, a range of lobbying activities by 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations is permitted and protected by U.S. law.

Several excellent organizations are dedicated to helping nonprofits understand and utilize their legal rights to lobby. In this handout we highlight two: the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (www.clpi.org), and the Alliance for Justice (www.afj.org). We strongly urge you to visit their sites and consult their materials.

Why Your Charity Should Elect To Come Under The 1976 Lobby Law - And How To Do It

(from the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest)

The right of citizens to petition their government is basic to our democratic way of life, and nonprofit, charitable organizations are one of the most effective vehicles for making use of citizen participation in shaping public policy. Fortunately, legislation passed by Congress in 1976 makes it possible for nonprofits to lobby freely for their causes, communities and individuals they serve. The federal government clearly supports lobbying by charities. Congress sent this unambiguous message when it enacted the exceedingly helpful 1976 lobby law. The same message came from the IRS in regulations issued in 1990. Together, the law and regulations provide wide latitude for charities to lobby.

But the law only provides this latitude for charities that elect to be covered by it. In most circumstances, nonprofits should become subject to this law - not only because it provides liberal limits on how much they can spend on lobbying, but also because it provides very clear and helpful definitions of what activities related to legislation do not constitute lobbying. If you are formally asked to testify before a congressional committee, for example, your testimony would not constitute a lobbying expense.

Generally, organizations that *elect* the 1976 lobby law may spend 20% of the first $500,000 of their annual expenditures on lobbying ($100,000), 15% of the next $500,000, and so on, up to $1 million dollars! If you do lobbying but don't elect to be subject to the 1976 law, your lobbying must be "insubstantial." This is a vague term that has never been defined. If you remain subject to this rule, you cannot be certain how much lobbying your charity can do.

Some charities have been reluctant to *elect* the 1976 law for fear that this action will either change their section 501(c)(3) status or serve as a "red flag" to the IRS and prompt an audit of the organization. Neither concern is justified. *Electing* to come under the 1976 law does not affect a charity's tax exempt status. Electing charities remain exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Further, the IRS has made clear in a letter to *INDEPENDENT SECTOR* that far from singling out for audit charities that elect, the reverse is true. The letter states, ". . . our intent has been, and continues to be, one of encouragement [of charities] to make the election . . . Experience also suggests that organizations that have made the election are usually in compliance with the restrictions on lobbying activities.

Worry-Free Lobbying for Nonprofits, a great 12-page booklet published by the Alliance for Justice, describes how nonprofit groups, and the foundations that support them, can take advantage of the **clear and generous provisions in federal law that encourage non-profit lobbying activity.** The booklet is concise and includes the one-page IRS form (501h) for non-profits to elect the 1976 Lobby Law described below.

Non-profit organizations considering a policy advocacy or lobbying effort should get this booklet and submit the simple IRS form it contains.

Nonprofit Lobbying Do's and Don'ts

CAN DO LIST

501(c)(3) organizations can lobby: it is legitimate, legal, encouraged, and protected

With the 501(h) election, lobbying is also clearly defined:

- Lobbying consists of communications that are intended to influence specific legislation.
- Legislation is action by a legislative body including the "introduction, amendment, enactment, defeat or repeal of Acts, bills, resolutions or similar items."
- Legislative bodies are Congress, state and local legislatures, and the general public in referenda, initiatives or proposed constitutional amendments.
- Specific actions excluded from the 501(h) definition of lobbying include:
  - invited testimony
  - nonpartisan analysis
  - study & research
  - self defense

501(h) Limits to lobbying

501(c)(3) organizations may spend up to 20% of their first $500,000 of "exempt purposes expenditures," plus 15% of the next $500,000 exempt purposes expenditures, plus 10% of the next $500,000, plus 5% of the remaining exempt purposes expenditures, up to at total cap of $1 million.

Note: Only organizations with exempt purpose expenditures in excess of $17 million will reach the $1 million cap.

Charities with the 501(h) election can spend up to 75% of their total lobbying limit on DIRECT LOBBYING:

- Communication to a legislator, staffer of other government employee, which
- Refers to a specific piece of legislation, and
- Expresses a view on it.
- It's ***direct lobbying*** when you state your position on a legislative proposal directly to your legislators/staffers or directly to your *members* and ask them to be in touch with legislators. (CLPI)
- The IRS says for tax purposes, a member of a 501(c)(3) organization is one who contributes more than a nominal amount of time or money to the charity.

Charities with the 501(h) election can spend no more than 25% of their total lobbying limit on GRASSROOTS LOBBYING:

- Effort to influence legislation by encouraging the public to contact legislators about legislation, which
- Refers to specific legislation, and expresses a view, and
- Encourages the recipient to take lobbying action.
- It is ***grassroots lobbying*** when a call to action goes to the *public* at large. (CLPI)

*Excerpted from Worry-Free Lobbying for Nonprofits, Alliance for Justice.
Please refer to this thorough and concise 12-page booklet for details on all of the information above. *www.afj.org*

See reverse for CAN'T DO LIST

Nonprofit Lobbying Do's and Don'ts

CAN'T DO LIST—Election-Related Activity*

501(c)(3) nonprofits sometimes confuse working for the election of a political candidate with lobbying. These two kinds of activity are in fact very different. It is perfectly legal (and highly appropriate) for a nonprofit to work for the passage of a particular piece of legislation, during a political campaign or at any other time. ***Working for the election of a particular candidate, however, whether at federal, state, or local levels is strictly prohibited and is cause for the charity to lose its tax-exempt status.***

501(c)(3) charitable organizations (charities) are **absolutely prohibited** from intervening in support of, or opposition to, a candidate or a political party. Unlike the lobbying law that has wide latitude for participation, there is a strict prohibition against partisan political activity by charitable nonprofits. The IRS can revoke tax-exemption for a single violation.

Cardinal DON'TS

Don't provide cash contributions or in-kind office space or services for candidates or campaigns.

Don't endorse or otherwise give a candidate official support. A charity's individual staff members can give personal support, but not in the name of their charity.

Don't allow political fundraising, distribution of campaign literature, or other campaign activities to occur on the charity's premises.

Permissible Nonpartisan Electoral Activities for 501(c)(3)s:

Charitable nonprofits may continue normal lobbying activities during the legislative session even when it is during a political campaign. And while a 501(c)(3) group cannot work on behalf of or against candidates, there are a number of other voter education activities that it can legally engage in, **in a *scrupulously nonpartisan manner*.**

Permissible activities include:

- Voter Registration
- Candidate Forums
- Candidate Questionnaires
- Voting Records
- Voter Guides

*Excerpted from the Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest

See reverse for CAN DO LIST

Role of Policy

Public policy, from local to international levels, plays a huge role in the shaping of our food and agricultural systems. Policies create research priorities and funding streams that influence the structure of agriculture in our communities, states and across the globe. Subsidies, research, technical assistance, loans and grants can all determine which types of agriculture and food systems development are supported and which must struggle against the prevailing tides.

Engaging in policy advocacy is one of the most direct and effective ways citizens have of holding public officials accountable to the public interest and revitalizing our democracy. Although we still have a long way to go, the sustainable food and agriculture movement has made great strides in crafting policies and programs that foster more just and sustainable production, processing and distribution systems.

Examples abound, from farmland preservation and enterprise development to food access and water quality, from urban agriculture and renewable energy to fair contracts and school food. A couple of places to go for more information on specific advocacy wins:

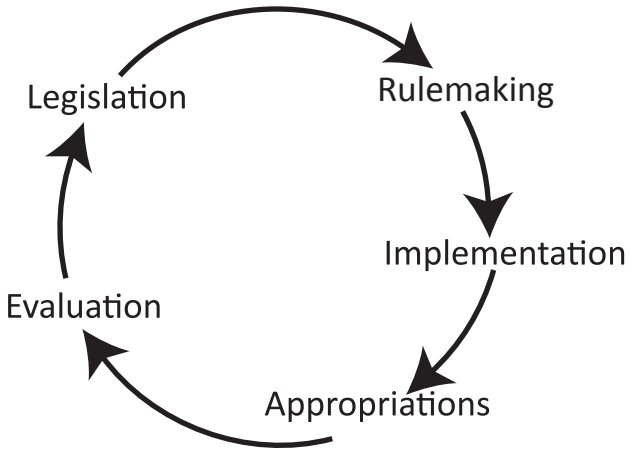
- Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group; *www.nesawg.org*
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition: *sustainableagriculturecoalition.org*

Reasons for Organizations to Engage in Advocacy

A common misconception among folks who are new to policy advocacy—and especially to work on legislation—is that the end goal is getting desired legislation passed. In reality, there are many opportunities to engage in public policy, beginning with the identification of policy solutions to problems, and continuing through a full cycle of legislation, rulemaking, implementation, appropriations, evaluation and often starting over again with needed modifications to existing laws or rules.

Citizen advocacy can play a critical role at each juncture to help ensure that:

- Legislation is crafted and passed to meet the real needs of farmers, workers and communities
- Rules are written that honor, rather than undermine, the intent of good legislation
- Implementation of loans, grants, research and technical assistance programs is fair, and that programs reach their intended recipients
- Funding is appropriated to make the policies and program work
- Policies are monitored, evaluated, and if needed, modified to achieve legislative goals



Reasons to Engage

in policy advocacy: public education, persuasion and/or lobbying

Many groups find it necessary to make the case for engaging the organization and/or its members in advocacy.

Here are some arguments that might help.

Reasons for individuals to engage in food and agriculture policy advocacy:

1. It's your money*.
2. The potential impact of policy is too important not to.
3. It's an investment in your future.
4. If you don't, someone else will.

Community Food Security Coalition

**e.g. subsidies; research funding; training, technical assistance, competitive grants and loan programs; local zoning and farmland preservation statutes, school food programs, etc.)*

Reasons for Organizations to Engage in Advocacy

Lobbying by 501(c)(3) nonprofits is a powerful strategy for making people's lives better and for building stronger communities. Sometimes when people hear the word lobbying, they say, "It's illegal for nonprofits to do" or "Lobbying is for organizations that have lots of money" or "Lobbying is for experts who are paid to know the process and have access." These statements are among the many myths about lobbying.

Lobbying on legislation and engaging in public policy advocacy through voter and candidate education can also be great for your organization because it can:

- Raise awareness of your mission
- Mobilize members, volunteers, donors and board
- Attract favorable media attention
- Establish and expand government investment in important social programs
- Reform laws and regulations that govern the operation and evaluation of your programs
- Confer benefits far beyond that of any one direct service program

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (clpi.org)

Reasons for Individuals to Engage in Advocacy

10 Reasons to Lobby for Your Cause

1. You can make a difference
2. People working together can make difference
3. People can change laws
4. Lobbying is a democratic tradition
5. Lobbying helps find real solutions
6. Lobbying is easy
7. Policy makers need your expertise
8. Lobbying helps people
9. The views of local nonprofits are important
10. Lobbying advances your cause and builds public trust

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (clpi.org)

Policy Advocacy Decision Path

Here are four key steps on the road to implementing a policy advocacy program for your organization.

1. GET READY

A. UNDERSTAND WHY POLICY ADVOCACY IS IMPORTANT → B. UNDERSTAND CONCEPTS AND TERMS → C. ASSESS ORGANIZATION AND COST/BENEFIT

D. DECIDE TO DO MORE/ BETTER ADVOCACY

2. GET THE LAY OF THE LAND:
- Internal
- External

3. DEVELOP YOUR STRATEGY

A. WHO DECIDES?
- Framework for initiating
- Ongoing protocol

B. ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

C. AUDIENCE(S)

D. STRATEGIES/ACTIVITIES

Suggested Approaches:
- Brainstorming
- History
- Matrix worksheet
- Research

4. TAKE NEXT STEPS *(for example)*
- Launch advocacy campaign
- Form committee(s)
- Assign staff
- Track lobbying activity
- Join an advocacy network

Policy Prioritizing Criteria

Mission	*Does work on this policy issue contribute directly to the organization's vision/ mission*	
Impact	*Is work on this policy central to the organization's operations & impact? Will it develop our leadership?*	
Capacity/ Expertise	*Does the organization have the capacity to address this issue (time, expertise, money, etc.) Does it draw on our strengths?*	
Effort/ Opportunity Cost	*How much staff time and effort will this require? What efforts/activities will be NOT be undertaken in order to focus on this?*	
Broad support	*Is it non-controversial w/in the organization & its network/ unlikely to alienate members, partners & supporters? Is it free of red flags?*	
Unmet need	*Is this a policy issue that few or no other groups seem to be working on? Or are other groups carrying water on this issue?*	
Urgency	*Does this address an urgent policy barrier or opportunity for our constituents? Is the issue timely? Can/should we start now?*	
Winnable	*Is this where we can make a difference? What is the likelihood of success? (incl. budgetary impl.) What does success look like?*	
Capacity Building	*Will work on this policy issue foster the organization's culture of inclusivity. Will it help educate and build the capacity of staff, constituents and others?*	
Alliances	*Will work on this issue help the organization build alliances & collaboration with other groups?*	
Constituent Priority/ Expertise	*Is this a priority for our constituents? Can core constituents (e.g. youth, urban gardeners) speak from direct experience? Relevance.*	
Consequences	*What are the strategic consequences of us engaging in this activity on this issue?*	
Clustering	*Can this issue be clustered with others to achieve a multiplier effect?*	
Other ?		

INSTITUTE FOR Sustainable Communities Advocacy & Leadership Center

"Nine Questions"

A Strategy Planning Tool for Advocacy Campaigns

Adapted From Jim Shultz of the Democracy Center

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1. What do we want? (GOALS)

Any advocacy effort must begin with a sense of its goals. Among these goals some distinctions are important. What are the long-term goals and what are the short-term goals? What are the content goals (e.g. policy change) and what are the process goals (e.g. building community among participants)? These goals need to be defined at the start, in a way that can launch an effort, draw people to it, and sustain it over time.

2. Who can give it to us? (AUDIENCES; KEY PLAYERS; or POWER-HOLDERS)

Who are the people and institutions you need to move? This includes those who have the actual formal authority to deliver the goods (i.e., legislators). This also includes those who have the capacity to influence those with formal authority (i.e., the media and key constituencies, both allied and opposed). In both cases, an effective advocacy effort requires a clear sense of who these audiences are and what access or pressure points are available to move them.

3. What do they need to hear? (MESSAGES)

Reaching these different audiences requires crafting and framing a set of messages that will be persuasive. Although these messages must always be rooted in the same basic truth, they also need to be tailored differently to different audiences depending on what they are ready to hear. In most cases, advocacy messages will have two basic components: an appeal to what is right and an appeal to the audience's self-interest.

4. Who do they need to hear it from? (MESSENGERS)

The same message has a very different impact depending on who communicates it. Who are the most credible messengers for different audiences? In some cases, these messengers are "experts" whose credibility is largely technical. In other cases, we need to engage the "authentic voices," those who can speak from personal experience. What do we need to do to equip these messengers, both in terms of information and to increase their comfort level as advocates?

5. How can we get them to hear it? (DELIVERY)

There are many ways to deliver an advocacy message. These range from the genteel (e.g. lobbying) to the in-your-face (e.g. direct action). The most effective means vary from situation to situation. The key is to evaluate them and apply them appropriately, weaving them together in a winning mix.

6. What do we have? (RESOURCES)

An effective advocacy effort takes careful stock of the advocacy resources that are already there to be built on. This includes past advocacy work that is related, alliances already in place, staff and other people's capacity, information and political intelligence. In short, you don't start from scratch, you start from building on what you've got.

7. What do we need to develop? (GAPS)

After taking stock of the advocacy resources you have, the next step is to identify the advocacy resources you need that aren't there yet. This means looking at alliances that need to be built, and capacities such as outreach, media, and research, which are crucial to any effort.

8. How do we begin? (FIRST STEPS)

What would be an effective way to begin to move the strategy forward? What are some potential short term goals or projects that would bring the right people together, symbolize the larger work ahead and create something achievable that lays the groundwork for the next step?

9. How do we tell if it's working? (EVALUATION)

As with any long journey, the course needs to be checked along the way. Strategy needs to be evaluated by revisiting each of the questions above (i.e., are we aiming at the right audiences; are we reaching them, etc.) It is important to be able to make mid-course corrections and to discard those elements of a strategy that don't work once they are actually put into practice.

Note: A common confusion in the development of advocacy strategy is the difference between "strategy" and "tactics." ***Tactics*** are specific actions – circulating petitions, writing letters, staging a protest – that are the building blocks of advocacy. ***Strategy*** is something larger, an overall map that guides the use of these tools toward clear goals. Strategy is a hard-nosed assessment of where you are, where you want to go, and how you can get there.

Tips for Policy Advocacy Grantwriting

Crafting measurable goals and outcomes

Whereas many grants are short-term (often only 1-2 years), achieving policy change is generally a long-term endeavor. Many funders making grants in the policy advocacy arena understand this, and yet both funders and grantees want to be able to demonstrate progress towards measurable outcomes. Below are a few suggestions for framing a proposal and for strategies or evaluating and reporting.

Be clear on what you want to do

- Advocacy can take several forms. Are you proposing to educate your constituency about public policy issues, engage the organization in policy development activities, or actively take positions on policy issues? Why are you choosing your specific strategy(ies)?
- Will any of your proposed activities constitute lobbying? Be clear about this one way or the other. Funders will want to know and will appreciate that you know what lobbying is and isn't. Emphasize that there is important work that does not trigger lobbying.

Start with needs statement

- Take great care to match the solutions you propose and the goals & activities you propose with the problems, needs & opportunities you outline. If the needs statement is too sweeping, the solutions you can realistically pursue won't have sufficient impact.
- It can be very helpful to review your needs statement after writing your goals and activities section. If you're clear on your goals and activities but they don't match your needs statement, change the statement to more closely reflect the specific needs your goals and activities address.
- You can still describe very large-scale problems, needs and realities to set the context for your work, but always bring the need/problem statement to the level of your work. Your organization and members may believe that we need fundamental changes in federal, state and local polices to discourage destructive, discriminatory food production and distribution practices and to foster sustainable, just food systems. However, as a relatively small, grassroots group just getting started in policy advocacy you can't claim wholesale transformation of federal food and agriculture policy as a realistic 1-3 year goal.
- So, the overarching problem may be that policies need to be completely overhauled, and contributing to that change may be your ultimate goal. But the needs you can realistically address in year one or two, and the corresponding activities you can undertake and report on should focus on where your organization can have a direct impact, such as:
  - Raising awareness of policy issues and opportunities with members, constituents and/or the public
  - Opening channels for plugging into policy work
  - Championing the power of collective action
  - Countering public disillusionment with government through success stories
  - Helping groups and individuals feel empowered to influence policy and government programs
  - Engaging the media
  - Building multi-sector support for common policy goals

Build the case for working on policy advocacy

- It will be important to communicate to funders--and members--the connection between your well-established programs, activities and mission and the policy advocacy work you're adding to your plate.
- Keep in mind that social justice/social change/advocacy funders often expect grantees to have some theory of, or specific approach to, social change. You might reference this in the proposal itself, or be prepared for follow-up questions along these lines.
- You may include the following statements to make your case:
  - Your organization has been doing local work for food system change for ___ years
  - Yet you can't fully realize the systemic changes you seek without addressing policy

- Policy is a primary driver in shaping the entire food system these specific ways (relate to your organization)
- Many people have little awareness of the role of policy in shaping the food system and of their role and potential as concerned citizens to shape policy
- Your organization has a long track record of raising awareness and interest in the food system (give examples)—this can translate to raising awareness in policy arena
- Advocacy works: groups and coalitions working on sustainable food systems have many successes to point to, give examples of how grassroots groups have affected policy
- Make a direct connection between these policy successes and your policy project or target programs (e.g. CFP grant, Farm-to-School, WIC/EBT, beginning farmers and ranchers)
- Use your own language to convey "government can get it right", "your tax dollars at work", "This is democracy in action."
- Ideally you can point to specific projects/efforts you're already engaged in that benefit from government policies, programs, research, technical assistance or funding streams
- With a track record of successful hands-on work, you're now adding a policy piece for greater impact
- You believe it's the right time to capitalize on the good will and respect you've garnered from your constituency by taking them to the next level

Working in Collaborations:

Non-profits feel pressure—and want—to work in collaboratively with other organizations. This is particularly true in the policy advocacy arena, where strength in numbers and support from a diversity of interests can make or break policy change. However:

When in doubt, don't do it

- If the timing is too rushed, you're pushing to meet a grant deadline and don't have sufficient time to know all the participants, to discuss and come to agreement on goals, roles, etc. Don't do it.
- Enormous time and energy can be spent on collaborative efforts that were poorly conceived, where partners are at cross-purposes, basic identification of problems and solutions diverge greatly, etc.

One useful gauge of good collaboration:

- When each participating organization feels its own priorities and goals can best be achieved through collaboration rather than by working alone.

If you decide to collaborate, start slow and broad

- When bringing a diversity of stakeholders together, seek first to establish shared interests and have a broad enough discussion of goals and concerns to find common ground, rather than starting right in with overly specific solutions or strategies, that may be divisive.
- In farm-to-school work, for example, your interest might be how to get more local food into the school system. But it may be helpful to start more broadly with a discussion about why each stakeholder at the table is interested in changing school food.
- Focus first on long-term vision, and move from there. Ask big, broad questions, such as:
  - What is your vision for _____?
  - What's preventing you from doing that?
  - Assets (what's working well, who are your allies/partners, why is it working…)

Accountability & partnerships

- Again, be careful about setting goals and matching activities with objectives you've laid out and the time frame you've set.
- Continuing with the farm-to-school example, your long-term goal may be to increase procurement and use of local/region food throughout your school district.
- However, if you're submitting a one-year planning grant for collaborative farm-to-school policy advocacy, you'll be hard pressed to demonstrate more local food in cafeterias in Year One.
- Acknowledge this and start with more realistic and achievable goals: build relationships, bring stakeholders to the table, establish shared understanding, understand how various groups (food service, non-profits, farmers, distributors, PTAs…) work and where goals and expertise intersect and complement.

Reporting on progress and successes

Reporting on policy work can be difficult and very different from reporting on such measurable outcomes as food produced or distributed; acres of farmland preserved; numbers of markets, vendors, and customers, etc. Which brings us back to the careful crafting of needs, goals and activities.

Framing your report

- Actual legislation passed and policymaker support for initiatives are just two measures of success. Others include:
  - Advocacy meetings: how many meetings, what kinds of meetings, what the meetings produced
  - Stakeholder engagement: how many and what kind of groups
  - Materials produced: fact sheets, white papers, advocacy training, alerts, sign-on letters, etc.
  - Relationships with policy makers
  - Coalition-building; working with other groups; developing strategies, positions, statements
  - Media coverage: letters to the editor, op-eds, feature articles, etc.
- Don't forget where you're starting from. Whether you're beginning or continuing policy advocacy, significant success and outcomes include:
  - dentifying common ground
  - Noting and setting aside differences
  - Setting next steps
  - Agreeing on even one or two policy targets
  - Crafting a shared strategy
  - Coordinating advocacy efforts

Evaluating/measuring social change outcomes

- Be sure to gather information throughout the grant period. Here are some examples of important benchmark data:
  - How many more people are engaged (what did they do to demonstrate "engagement"?)
  - How they've changed (attitudes, understanding, level of involvement…)
  - What meaningful activities they've done (testimonials are great)
  - How they have taken leadership
- Last but not least, talk about insights you've gained, even setbacks you've experienced and lessons learned in the process.

Resources

NESAWG:

There is a wealth of information on the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Website

www.nesawg.org and our new social networking site, www.nefood.org.

In particular, check out:

NESAWG's Northeast User Guide to the 2008 Farm Bill for a description of programs of importance to the Northeast, along with guidance for how to get involved.

NESAWG Special Edition Policy Newsletters

These highlight policy innovations in Northeast states in five topic areas. Excellent reference for policymakers and advocates working on state-level policy.

- Integrating agriculture and economic development
- Farmland affordability
- Institutional procurement
- Food processing and licensing
- Dairy (also includes "miscellaneous")

Agricultural Policy in the Northeast States: Inventory and Innovation

A comprehensive investigation of state policies and programs in the area of farm viability, market development and promotion, and farmland preservation, land use and conservation in the twelve NE states. This 80-page publication describes and highlights existing policies and programs, and proposes reforms and innovations, based on interviews with over sixty agriculture policy-makers and advocates from Maine to West Virginia.

Other food & agriculture policy advocacy sites:

www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org

wwww.healthyfarmbill.org

Civic Engagement Sites

Alliance For Justice: www.afj.org

Center for Democracy and Citizenship: www.publicwork.org

Center for Civic Education: www.civiced.org

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest: www.clpi.org

Institute for Sustainable Communities: Advocacy & Leadership Center: http://www.iscvt.org/what_we_do/advocacy_and_leadership_center/ (formerly Advocacy Institute)

Civic Engagement & Service Learning: www.apa.org/ed/slce/civicengagement.html

