

CHAPTER 22

Policy Advocacy and Lobbying in Human Services Organizations

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I think absolutely that [the] policy impact [of my organization] is even more important than service provision. There has to be some kind of communication to policymakers.

—Executive director of mid-sized youth development organization in a low-income neighborhood

Participating in advocacy is an issue of time. But the way I see it is that we can't afford not to be advocates.

—Director of mid-sized residential drug and alcohol treatment center

I spend more time on advocacy than on fundraising. It's a better pay off. A bigger responsibility.

—Executive director of small organization providing employment assistance for the elderly

The above quotes reflect the importance of an often overlooked, but critical, skill for managers of human service organizations: the ability to conduct meaningful policy advocacy in order to boost awareness of and resources available to an organization, its clients, and its community. The quotes also reflect some of the tradeoffs involved in advocacy: participating

takes time, is sometimes perceived as detracting from service provision goals, and can involve financial costs.

This chapter begins by outlining both the important reasons for managers to develop advocacy skills and the barriers that keep some from participating in political activities. Unfortunately, what is known about advocacy by human services organizations is spread out across several disparate literatures, including work on social movements, interest groups, nonprofit organizations, and community organizing. This chapter seeks to critically interpret this wide-ranging literature in terms of its relevance for administration and leadership in human service organizations. Misunderstanding of the legal context, as well as lack of resources or knowledge, keeps many human service managers from pursuing advocacy goals. After discussing these incentives and constraints, this chapter explores the organizational and environmental factors managers should consider when developing an advocacy agenda and concludes by reviewing useful strategies and tactics.

Advocacy in the Human Services

As a tool to advance social justice, advocacy has historically been an important part of the practice of social workers and other human service professionals. Human service administrators have played a particularly important role in conducting advocacy, and in the early settlement house movement, administration and advocacy were seen to be organically related. Indeed, many of the idealized models for social change and advocacy in social welfare history were administrators. Jane Addams and her contemporaries, such as Lillian Wald and Julia Lathrop, were tireless advocates during the Progressive Era, participating actively in lobbying activity, even during a time when women were denied the right to vote. Their legacy has resulted in advocacy and political activity always being included side by side with service provision on the agendas of social work professional associations (Schneider & Lester, 2001).

Today, the importance of teaching advocacy skills is recognized by the Council on Social Work Education, and active, not passive, involvement in advocacy and social change is also in the National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) Code of Ethics as part of social work's ethical responsibility to broader society. Section 6.04 states that "Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice" (NASW, 1999). Policy advocacy is an integral part of good social work practice and a responsibility of social work leaders, including administrators (Alexander, 1982).

Policy advocacy is different from case advocacy, which is advocacy on behalf of individuals or families. Defined as "any attempt to influence the decisions of any institutional elite on behalf of a collective interest" (Jenkins, 1987, p. 297), policy advocacy has the potential to impact much larger groups of people through the process of incremental social change. Policy advocacy tactics are the specific actions taken, and targets are those people or communities whom the advocacy is intended to influence (Lofland, 1996). As is clear from the definition given above, policy advocacy is a broad term that encompasses many different tactics, including everything from sitting on government committees and testifying before Congress to sponsoring protests or boycotts. Similarly, advocacy campaigns can target many different groups. For example, federal legislators may be targeted in a lobbying campaign to bring about a badly needed policy change. Alternatively, state- or county-level administrative agencies may be targeted when advocating for an administrative rule change or to protect a vital funding stream that is at risk. In other situations, community members may be targeted in a public education campaign. Human service organizations can and do participate in all of these activities.

One special kind of advocacy, lobbying, is defined as advocating for or against specific legislation and is limited, but not prohibited, by

the IRS for 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. All the other activities mentioned above may be freely undertaken. The legal environment surrounding policy advocacy will be discussed more below, but it should be mentioned that while advocacy activities are conceived of and carried out by individuals, manager-advocates are generally representing and speaking for their organization, not themselves. This has some important legal implications, which make the rules governing advocacy different for managers of nonprofits versus managers of public organizations. According to the U.S. Office of Special Council, managers of public organizations face special rules and restrictions when participating in political advocacy, pursuant to the 1939 Hatch Act, which governs the activities of federal employees. Often, similar legislation exists at the state level. For the most part, public employees may not lobby while on the job, may not use agency resources to lobby, and may not speak for their agencies. They may, however, provide impartial, factual information about pending legislation. Additionally, most public employees may participate in advocacy and political campaigns on their own time, but they must be careful to speak as private citizens rather than as public employees. The Supreme Court has recently upheld the view that when public employees speak as part of their official duties, their First Amendment rights are limited (*Garcetti v. Ceballos*, 126 S.Ct. 1951 [2006]).

For this reason, this chapter will focus on nonprofit human services organizations, which have more leeway when it comes to policy advocacy, employ large numbers of human services professionals as administrators, and serve significant numbers of the needy and underrepresented. Indeed, nonprofits are often considered to have a special responsibility to participate in policy advocacy as part of their mission to serve the public good. It has been argued that by speaking for underrepresented classes of people, nonprofit advocacy facilitates the democratic process and leads to increased political participation and a stronger civil society (Berry, 2003; Reid, 1999). Although some of their advocacy

tactics and constraints are shared by other kinds of organizations, such as social movement organizations, think tanks, and grassroots interest groups, human services nonprofits face particular incentives and challenges as they try to balance their commitment to service provision with their desire to help create social change.

Importance of the Advocacy Role in Human Services Management: Why Should Managers Choose to Advocate?

Given the importance of policy advocacy in the pursuit of social justice, and the special role social workers and other administrators of human services nonprofits have in conducting it, we must ask, What is the actual prevalence of advocacy among human services organizations? The question is harder to answer than it seems. Different investigations have produced very different estimates over time, partly depending on how the researchers defined advocacy and what group of organizations they studied. In one of the earlier investigations, Sosin (1986) found that only 11% of the social service organizations he studied were involved in political activities. Pawlak and Flynn (1990) found a drastically different number just a few years later, however, with over 90% of the executive directors of human services organizations that they studied reporting involvement in some kind of advocacy activity. A few years after that, Salamon (1995) reported that only about 18% of human services nonprofits responding to a national survey reported involvement in advocacy. In 2003, however, Berry reported that about 28% of the human services nonprofits in his national sample said they met “frequently” with government officials. That same year, Mosley, Katz, Hasenfeld, and Anheier (2003) found that over half the human service nonprofits in Los Angeles County reported advocacy activity when it was defined broadly. This varied, however, from 83% of the largest organizations (expenditures over \$5 million) to 39% of the smallest (expenditures under \$100,000).

Most recently, Child and Grønberg (2007) found that 27% of nonprofits in Indiana participated in advocacy, again defined broadly.

Regardless of the exact number of organizations participating in advocacy, reports of low rates are troubling because there are so many reasons for managers to involve their organizations in advocacy. Managers trying to decide whether to involve their organizations in advocacy, or who are seeking to convince relevant organizational stakeholders of the importance of advocacy, need to consider a variety of different arguments. Perhaps the most important reason, however, is that advocacy is an important service for clients. The clients of human services nonprofits are often needy and underrepresented and frequently lack substantial political power (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). Policy advocacy by human service organizations can help address this important social justice issue (Dodd & Gutierrez, 1990).

In addition to this, increased services for vulnerable communities, improved service delivery systems, and increased resources for human service organizations are all possible payoffs. Advocacy by human service nonprofits can improve public policy by providing vital feedback to policymakers regarding how policy is working "on the ground." Managers of human service organizations have a front row seat to see which policies are working and how others could be improved (Alexander, 1982). For example, over the last 20 years, advocates working with homeless children in a variety of settings witnessed their special needs, some of which were being overlooked by current policy. By lobbying everyone from school districts to the federal government, they have contributed to improvements in multiple reauthorizations of the McKinney-Vento Act, which resulted in new policies protecting preschool-age children and those living in domestic violence shelters. The policies establish homeless children's categorical eligibility for free lunches and preserve the right of students to remain in their school of origin when they experience homelessness (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

Participation in policy advocacy can also contribute to the health of the organization itself. Human service nonprofits are often directly impacted by policy mandates in terms of regulations, eligibility for services, and funding. Clearly, it is in their best interest, both in terms of organizational growth and effective service delivery, to advocate policies that create new funding and service opportunities. As Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) write, "the political context is a place for formally institutionalizing the survival of the organization, guaranteeing it access to the resources it needs" (p. 190). An example of this is the Violence Against Women Act, which was brought about largely because of nonprofit advocacy (Kurz, 1998). Beyond the important goal of helping to reduce domestic violence, another direct result of that Act was drastically increased funding for domestic violence work. Overall, advocacy can help organizations influence their task environment in order to promote the legitimacy of their preferred service technology and help achieve domain consensus.

Research has also demonstrated how advocacy can help reconceptualize a field of practice, opening up new funding possibilities and creating badly needed new services. One example is efforts by youth services advocates to promote programs that emphasize positive youth development, rather than services that primarily see youth as delinquents needing intervention. Scott, Deschenes, Hopkins, Newman, and McLaughlin (2006) have documented how youth services advocates in the San Francisco Bay area have made significant progress in changing the terms of the youth services debate by building coalitions that opposed punitive legislation. Advocacy helped organizations practicing positive youth development gain increased legitimacy, ultimately transforming the organizational field.

For all of the reasons given above, advocacy is increasingly becoming a critical area of involvement for managers. Menefee (2000) argues that advocacy is one of the 11 key activities of human service managers and that its importance is growing in an increasingly turbulent environment. Frumkin and Andre-Clark (2000) agree with this assessment, arguing that as for-profit

organizations increasingly enter the human services, nonprofit organizations can best compete with them by highlighting the mission-driven dimension of their programming. One key way to do this is to express organizational values through advocacy. Finally, Eisenberg (2000a) argues that if human service managers really want to make a difference in their chosen areas, they must pay more attention to their role as advocates and not let day-to-day programmatic or bureaucratic concerns derail their efforts.

Reports from human service leaders who have been actively involved in advocacy support these findings. Pawlak and Flynn (1990) found that when asked about the consequences of their political participation, almost all of the executive directors they studied reported little to no lasting negative consequences from advocacy participation and cited many more positive consequences. The consequences they mentioned included creating new funding opportunities, staving off cutbacks, winning desired new legislation or regulations, increasing access to key decision makers, and witnessing improvements in how policymakers understood important community issues.

Overcoming Barriers to Involvement

Given these excellent reasons to be involved, what is holding managers of human service organizations back? There are three primary areas of constraint: legal restrictions and misunderstandings, leadership initiative and training, and organizational capacity.

Legal Restrictions and Misunderstandings

The first, fear of violating the law, is a very real concern as the legal environment surrounding nonprofit advocacy is complex and the penalties for breaking the lobbying laws are severe—an organization's 501(c)(3) status can be revoked for engaging in excessive lobbying. The complexity has led to the mistaken belief by many social welfare administrators that their organizations are more restricted legally than they actually are. There is also evidence that some managers limit their organizations' advocacy activity even when they are not participating in lobbying because they are fearful and confused about the IRS rules and thus stay out of the political arena altogether (Salkin & Rutigliano, 1998).

Berry (2003) quizzed nonprofit leaders about their knowledge of lobbying regulations and found striking differences regarding their knowledge of what the tax code allows regarding their political participation. He found that very few nonprofits that had not taken the H election (see the text box titled "Lobbying and the Legal Environment" for more information on the H election) knew the basics about their political rights. For example, only 54% knew that it was acceptable for them to support or oppose legislation, and only 32% knew it was legal to lobby if their organization accepted government funds (it is, just not with government funds). Organizations that had taken the H election were much more knowledgeable about what was allowed, answering correctly between 70–98% of the time.

LOBBYING AND THE LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

One reason managers of human service organizations may stay away from advocacy is the fear that they are doing something illegal. For most organizations, this is not the case. In a legal sense, there are essentially three forms of advocacy. The first is electioneering or "express advocacy," which includes supporting or opposing specific candidates or political parties. This type of partisan activity

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is prohibited for 501(c)(3)s. The second is lobbying, which is explicitly regulated by the IRS for 501(c)(3)s. The third category comprises everything else and is basically unregulated.

Also known as legislative advocacy, lobbying is the common term used for efforts to influence legislation. There are two forms of lobbying and each is regulated differently. Direct lobbying occurs when organizations directly contact decision makers in support of or against specific legislation. Grassroots lobbying occurs when organizations encourage their membership or the general public to contact decision makers in support of or against specific legislation. Other related public policy activities, such as contacting legislators about specific regulations or conducting public education, are not lobbying and so are not limited. The important distinction between grassroots lobbying and public education is that grassroots lobbying contains a "call to action" and public education does not.

The rules for what is allowed and what is not are complicated by the IRS's two different regulation policies. Prior to 1976, all 501(c)(3)s were faced with the same regulation—expenditures on lobbying were limited to being an "insubstantial" part of a nonprofit's activities. What was substantial and what was not was not defined, and staff and volunteer time and effort were included. In 1976, however, Congress passed the Tax Reform Act, which allowed nonprofits to make the "501(h)" election, which, if an organization chooses it, provides clear guidelines about limits on lobbying expenditures. Hard to measure elements, such as staff and volunteer time, are not factored in as expenditures. In general, an H elector may spend 20% of its first \$500,000 on lobbying, 15% of the next \$500,000, and so on, up to a total limit of \$1,000,000. However, only 25% of that can be spent on grassroots lobbying (Raffa, 2000). Organizations that do not elect to be governed by the H election (only about 2.5% make the election) simply continue to be governed by the "insubstantial" test. Taking the H election is easy—organizations simply fill out the one-page Form 5768 and send it to the IRS.

Human service managers should also be aware of the numerous challenges to nonprofit advocacy rights that have been appearing before Congress with ever-greater frequency (Bass, Guinane, & Turner, 2003). The best known of these attacks on the right of nonprofits to advocate was Rep. Ernest Istook's failed 1995 attempt to amend a major appropriations bill with language that would have prohibited nonprofits who accept any government funding to lobby at all. This would have had clear implications for the heavily government-financed human services sector. Currently, nonprofits that accept government funding may lobby, but they may not use government-provided funds to do so. Other, more recent threats include several bills that have included amendment language restricting the rights of government grantees to participate in nonpartisan voter registration and advocacy, though as of yet none have passed. These bills include the authorization of major funding streams for affordable housing programs, Head Start, and legal services. Human service administrators should be aware of this trend and monitor its development because further restrictions would have serious implications regarding the ability of human service professionals, agencies, and managers to speak for their clients or inform policy debates.

Leadership Initiative and Training

The second reason advocacy often does not occur in human service organizations is a lack of initiative on the part of managers themselves. Schneider and Lester (2001) list several reasons social workers hold back from advocacy, many

of which are applicable to human service managers. These include a preoccupation with a service role, lack of professional norms and standards around advocacy, lack of training, concern with professionalism, and disagreement with any commonly proposed solutions to social problems.

Some of these barriers may be resolved if advocacy skills were given greater weight in graduate programs. Many schools of social work do not offer courses on advocacy specifically, the literature on advocacy is slim compared to the literature on many other managerial skills, and appropriate field placements and internships seem to be particularly lacking. Mor Barak, Travis, and Bess (2004) found that most social work managers did not see their fieldwork experience as providing them with sufficient training in administration skills, including advocacy. Furthermore, Wolk, Pray, Weismiller, and Dempsey (1996) found that only 33% of social work programs they surveyed had policy advocacy placements available, even for second-year MSW students. Of course, this is a vicious cycle because the lack of placements in advocacy settings is partly due to the paucity of MSWs who are able and willing to supervise students in this kind of practice.

Lack of political involvement may also have to do with the overwhelming time constraints many managers face. Advocacy can be very time consuming and does not always have an immediate payoff. Pawlak and Flynn (1990) found that the top complaints cited by executive directors who were involved with advocacy were that it led them to work too many hours and intruded on their personal lives. Additionally, leaders must insure that other agency functions are attended to while the administrator is engaged in advocacy work. Overworked human service managers may simply feel they do not have time to participate in another activity in addition to supporting existing service programs and fundraising.

This is reflective of the fact that executive leadership is generally not rewarded for attempts to achieve broad community objectives. Rather, they are encouraged to focus on more narrow organizational goals (Eisenberg, 2000b). This means that it often requires the personal commitment of a leader to maintain an active advocacy program. However, managers who have strong leadership skills can fight pressures to focus on short-term, intra-agency goals.

Educating key organizational stakeholders, particularly the board of directors, about the payoffs for advocacy is crucial (Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Pawlak & Flynn, 1990). Marwell (2004) found that leaders who have a strong interest in political activity can boost acceptance of this activity in an organization, even when institutional pressures to avoid it are strong.

In short, leadership is critical in order for human service organizations to be active in advocating on behalf of people they serve. Because the responsibility to initiate an advocacy program often falls to the executive director, administrators must have the drive to pursue it, educate themselves on how to communicate with policymakers, and motivate both their staff and board in the belief that involvement in advocacy will benefit the organization and its clients.

Organizational Capacity

The final set of reasons many managers choose not to involve their organizations in advocacy is related to organizational capacity. Kirsten Grønberg and her colleagues (Grønberg, Cheney, Leadingham, & Liu, 2007) found that about 80% of the nonprofits they surveyed identified challenges regarding capacity for networking and advocacy. Over half the organizations surveyed specifically mentioned four areas as particular challenges: enhancing the public understanding of key policy issues, strengthening relationships with key policymakers, responding effectively to community expectations, and interacting with other organizations to learn better practices. When asked what types of assistance were most needed to help them meet these challenges, over half mentioned specific forms of financial assistance, namely, increased multi-year funding, funding for general overhead, and increased availability of small grants for networking and advocacy. Clearly, financial constraints were at the forefront when managers thought of how to build or start a more effective advocacy program.

It is true that it can be very difficult to get advocacy funded. A major study cosponsored by the Independent Sector and the Foundation Center found that only 11% of the grant money given by the largest U.S. foundations goes to social justice concerns (Lawrence, Jalandoni, & Smith, 2005). Barriers mentioned by those foundations include an adverse political climate, little collaboration in the field, and a sense that resources were not sufficient to meet increasingly severe needs. Other scholars have argued that foundations are essentially conservative and hesitant to fund advocacy that, if successful, would result in disruptions to the status quo (McAdam, 1982; Roelofs, 2003). Many foundations essentially limit the amount of advocacy and lobbying their grantees can participate in by using restrictive language in their grant agreements, even though it is legal for the recipient organizations to spend money on advocacy (Reid, 1999). This is partly because foundations face their own set of IRS regulations over how much of the grant money they give out can be spent on lobbying. Others have argued that foundations sometimes hold back on funding advocacy because it is hard to measure outcomes and return on investment, although Scott and Carson (2003) have shown that when lobbying efforts are successful, the payoff can be huge. They give an example of a \$1 million advocacy campaign conducted by nonprofits participating in the AmeriCorps program that resulted in an extra \$100 million in AmeriCorps funding.

The difficulty in raising funds specifically for advocacy means that larger organizations with more “slack” in their budget often have greater capacity for advocacy. Many studies have shown that larger organizations are more likely to participate in advocacy, or to have more developed advocacy programs (Child & Grønbjerg, 2007; Mosley et al., 2003; Nicholson-Crotty, 2007). Organizational size also conveys status and stability, both factors that can increase access to important decision makers (Berry, 2003).

Having more resources to go around can also lessen the impression that advocacy is “taking away” from programs for clients. It is vitally important for managers to remember the common

perception that every dollar spent on advocacy means money not spent on the agency’s core services. This tradeoff can create tension within the organization, with some staff or board members questioning the utility of advocacy (Berry, 2003). However, there is some indication that, if supported, staff members may be eager to participate in greater levels of advocacy. Herbert and Mould (1992) found that child welfare workers had high levels of interest in pursuing more advocacy, but lack of support by their agency and lack of education on how to conduct advocacy kept them from participating. They also found that organizational leaders generally did not solicit workers’ feedback about what in the system needed to change.

Other organizational characteristics beyond size can also increase capacity for advocacy. Research on interest groups has shown that the ability to mobilize large numbers of people makes up for some lack of financial resources (Berry, 2003). In a study of nonprofits engaged in advocacy for children, researchers from the Urban Institute (DeVita, Montilla, Reid, & Fatiregun, 2004) found that although capacity needs differed between organizations depending on their political goals, there were particular strategies that could be used to strengthen advocacy programs overall. The first was having leadership that was skilled at maintaining networks, promoting collaborations, and doing outreach, both within and outside the organization. The second was having a policy advisory committee, and the third was utilizing feedback from constituents to improve communications. It is these kinds of strategies and tactics that skilled human services managers consider when building or expanding advocacy programs.

Advocacy Toolbox: Strategies and Tactics for the Human Service Manager

Even for managers who are committed to involving their organization in advocacy and have developed the organizational support to do so,

thinking about strategy and how best to conduct a specific advocacy campaign can be daunting. Planning is vital. Managers must think about which issues they will choose to become involved in by considering what is most important to various stakeholders (clients, board members), what outcomes may have the greatest payoff to the organization, and what campaigns are truly winnable (Gibelman & Kraft, 1996). Short-term as well as long-term goals need to be spelled out regardless of how large or small the issue is.

There is a wide range of advocacy tactics available to human services organizations. Tactics that have traditionally been known as “outsider,” or extra-institutional (Gamson, 1975), include conducting or participating in demonstrations and boycotts or performing other types of social action. Community organizing is sometimes thought of as an outsider tactic. “Insider” tactics involve dealing directly with traditional electoral, judicial, and lobbying systems. Human service organizations also often use tactics that don’t fall neatly into one of these categories, such as writing letters to the editor, participating in coalitions, or providing public education.

Turner and Killian (1987) argue that managers should think strategically about how effective a given tactic will be, given its costs, while also trying to choose tactics that meet the symbolic character of the cause and build sympathy and commitment. They also outline how organizations choose different tactics and targets depending on their advocacy goal. When the goal is to impact policy directly, elite targets such as administrators, legislators, and funders are generally chosen, and insider tactics, like lobbying or administrative advocacy, are used. When the goal is societal transformation, or “changing the hearts and minds of people,” targeting the general public is generally chosen. This can be done through a variety of tactics. Conducting public education, issuing policy reports, and working with the media can help inform people and persuade them to take action or change their position. Social action, like protests and boycotts, can show the commitment of supporters and draw attention to the cause.

Coalitions

A popular tactic engaged in by many human service nonprofits is to join advocacy-related coalitions (Also see Chapter 21 for further discussion of coalitions). Coalitions are groups of affiliated organizations advocating on issues in which they have a shared interest, whether a similar client population, a similar service technology, or a shared geographical location. Coalition work has both advantages and disadvantages. The major advantages include having increased leverage through the appearance of unity, the ability to pursue multiple policy goals at once, increased access to information, exposure to new advocacy skills, and the ability to network around other issues, such as service coordination or fundraising (DeVita et al., 2004; Dluhy, 1990).

Coalitions also have serious disadvantages, however, including a loss of autonomy for each member, time delays, difficulties in finding ways to work together, and disagreement about goals (Hojnacki, 1997; Mulroy, 2003). Balancing the need for broad-based support in a coalition and maintaining a consistent message is an inherent problem in coalition work. Often members are involved for slightly different reasons or have different beliefs about the nature of the problem and disagree about preferred solutions. Finding a message that can unite the voices of all participants without excluding or offending anyone is difficult and calls for creativity and flexibility.

To ensure the effectiveness of a coalition, a number of factors must be considered, some of which may be difficult to address. Goodwin (2001) warns that for coalitions to be maximally effective, they should be formed before the identified problem has reached a point of urgency. Most important, coalitions should be strategic about selecting goals, establishing time frames, and determining which targets and tactics are appropriate (Dluhy, 1990). Other characteristics of effective advocacy coalitions include having enduring, flexible memberships; a lack of organizational ego issues; a clear vision; and good communication with one another (Goodwin, 2001).

Media Communications

Working with the media can be intimidating, but it can be extremely effective when it is successful. It is also an essential skill because it is relevant to many different tactics. For example, in order for a boycott to be successful, people must know about it. Alternatively, if an organization is lobbying to protect funding for homeless shelters, it may be helpful to place a story in the paper highlighting how overcrowded shelters are having to turn needy families away.

Common advice regarding how to use media communications effectively includes the following. First, many stories compete every day for limited space, and a story is more likely to get picked up if it is about something new and interesting. A press release about an important issue that is not framed in a compelling and innovative way may not be able to compete with the latest news from Hollywood. Also, the frequency of the message is important. Research has shown that people may not remember or feel compelled to act on an issue until they have heard about it at least four times (Story, 2001). Third, never underestimate the power of a real-life example. An issue that has a human face will stay with people and be the story that gets repeated to others. Finally, when working with the media, it is important to select a format that best fits the news you are promoting (Richan, 1996). An event may be more likely to get picked up by radio or a local newsletter or special interest weekly. An issue of local concern may have luck at a larger newspaper, such as a regional daily. Having an issue that you can put a human face to—a human interest story—is often the only way to get television news coverage.

Framing the Issue

The concept of “framing” political issues has recently become a topic of much discussion, partly due to several popular analyses of political campaign strategies (e.g., Lakoff, 2004). The

notion has a much longer history in the academic literature, however, beginning with the work of Erving Goffman (1974) and Tversky and Kahneman (1981). More recently, Benford and Snow (2000) defined frames as “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the actions” of an organization (p. 614). Frames are important because they provide direction about how to think about a problem. They guide attributions about the cause of the problem, as well as which solutions will be seen as preferable. Opinions have been shown to be quite malleable and sensitive to the way problems are framed (Iyengar, 1990). How an organization frames a message also helps determine which groups of people will be most likely to hear it. Surveying members or otherwise soliciting how they understand important issues is one way that organizations can help frame their messages in ways that resonate with the people they are trying to reach (DeVita et al., 2004).

Frames are strategic, dynamic, and ongoing rather than static. Political and cultural changes, as well as other changes in the policy environment, impact frame construction, leading organizations to reconsider and reframe their beliefs and their messages. For example, advocates concerned about teen pregnancy might frame the problem as being about morals, negative outside influences, or the availability of accurate information about sex. The same advocate might use these different messages to motivate different audiences, or they may be chosen by different advocates who have different preferred policy solutions. Different frames also require presenting different kinds of information, for example, statistics about the extent of a problem versus stories that put a human face on a problem.

Master frames are frames that are used by many different groups on many different issues because they are so flexible, inclusive, and culturally resonant (Benford & Snow, 2000). These include frames about “justice,” “human rights,” “choice,” and “democracy.” Using a frame of this type can be useful because it is difficult for opponents to argue “against” justice or “against”

human rights. Not infrequently, both sides of an issue will claim to be representing one or more of these values. For example, in the welfare reform debate of 1996, advocates for welfare rights claimed that time limits for income assistance were *unjust* because they would negatively impact innocent children, while opponents argued that letting families receive welfare without time limits was *unjust* to taxpayers who worked and did not receive welfare.

New Technologies

Another strategy that more and more human service organizations are contemplating is how best to use the Internet to mobilize community members, communicate with allies, provide information, or conduct outreach. Indeed, the rise of the Internet has made many forms of advocacy easier for nonprofits and has possibly even opened up new opportunities. Hick and McNutt (2002) argue that the Internet can be particularly useful for contacting policymakers, organizing allies, and “getting the word out.” Delany (2006) warns that when using the Internet, however, it is important to consider your audience and to make sure that your message, design, and tools resonate with the people you are trying to reach. People who are looking at an organization’s Web site are often already interested in the issue at hand, so a Web site is a good place to provide additional in-depth information. It may also be useful to frame your information differently to suit the culture, perspective, and history of those you are trying to reach. Things to consider are age, political persuasion, and educational level. It should also be remembered that measuring the impact of Internet-related communication strategies is often quite difficult and that the impact of Internet-related advocacy strategies may be reduced for organizations that are trying to reach low-income populations or constituencies that speak languages other than English (DeVita et al., 2004).

Who Should Participate?

Finally, managers may find it helpful to structure participation in their organization’s advocacy activity in different ways, depending on the size of the organization. Although in many organizations responsibility for advocacy falls to the executive director, advocacy can be something that all staff members are encouraged to participate in, or it can be the stated job responsibility of one or more staff members. Staff can be very effective advocates because they are often the ones who see how policies are playing out on the front lines and know personal stories that can serve as powerful advocacy tools (Hayes & Mickelson, 2000). They may also feel empowered by advocating for their clients, resulting in increased feelings of empathy and lower rates of “burn-out” (Gutierrez, 1992). Ezell (1994) found that agency-level characteristics and preferences strongly influenced the advocacy activity of social workers. He also found that while administrators were more involved in policy advocacy than direct service workers, the latter were more involved with case advocacy.

Members of the board of directors should also not be overlooked when it comes to advocacy activity, nor should other volunteers from the community or past and present agency clients. Board members are often chosen to be involved in the organization partly because of their strong influence and networks in the community. Mobilizing this social capital on behalf of the organization can be an extremely effective tool in terms of gaining access to decision makers. Involving clients has the added benefit of adding legitimacy to the organization’s message and is thought to be an empowering intervention for clients (Gibelman & Kraft, 1996; Mondros & Wilson, 1994). Involving community members in advocacy efforts to change policy can sometimes be a step in helping the community to resolve the factors that led to the problems in the first place (Donnelly & Majka, 1998; Ferre, 1987). This involvement can also lay the groundwork for future mobilization efforts and increase community capacity (Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh, & Vidal, 2001).

Striving for Effectiveness

Choosing the most effective advocacy strategy will depend on the capacity of the organization and the goal of the advocacy. However, a few studies have pointed to some general rules of thumb. Susan Rees (1999) studied the structure and activities of 12 national nonprofits that policymakers themselves identified as “highly effective.” Some of the activities or traits she found most important were taking a bipartisan approach; spending the majority of time and resources on one top priority; and disseminating information to lawmakers in a way that makes their job easier, such as providing statistics about the extent of a problem in a community. Rees also found it was helpful to expose policymakers to people experiencing the problem firsthand, so as to make the issue come alive—an activity that should come easily to most human services organizations. A final recommendation she mentioned, also emphasized by others (Gibelman & Kraft, 1996), is to maintain a constant presence with policymakers, rather than just showing up when there is an urgent issue to address. This is important advice to remember for cash-strapped human service organizations that may try to save money by only participating in advocacy when they are experiencing an immediate problem. Maintaining ongoing relationships can make a vital difference when there is a crisis.

Obviously, ongoing advocacy can be draining on organizational resources, especially for small organizations. Two ways to overcome this were already mentioned above. The first is increasing the capacity and reach of the organization by mobilizing volunteers, board members, and community members to participate in advocacy-related work. The second is to form or join ongoing advocacy coalitions for this purpose. Advocacy coalitions hold much promise for boosting effectiveness while sharing advocacy-related costs, but coalitions often work on an ad hoc basis when specific bills or issues of concern are in play. Groups of organizations working together over time in order to achieve larger long-term goals could significantly increase the capacity

of each organization to achieve agenda success. Another way is to join an umbrella organization—a voluntary association created either by leaders in the field or by an association of organizations (Gibelman & Kraft, 1996). Umbrella organizations typically have an independent existence outside the founding players and choose issues to be involved in on a long-term basis. In California, for example, the California Welfare Directors Association has played an important role in influencing welfare policy at the state level. The Mental Health Association in New York State has played a similar role influencing mental health policy in that state. Advocacy participation through these types of interest groups typically reduces costs and increases anonymity for organizations concerned about retribution.

Dear and Patti (1981) have given classic advice, suggesting several important tactics for legislative advocacy, especially when advocates plan to be highly involved with a single bill. They write that these tactics are aimed specifically at advocates who face constraints in terms of power and resources, although both would clearly smooth the process, especially with the increasing influence of lobbyists and the growth of “pay-to-play” politics (McChesney, 2000). Their recommendations include making sure the bill gets introduced early, having more than one legislator sponsor the bill, making sure those legislators have sufficient influence in the chamber to move the bill along, considering the reality of partisan politics and making sure that the bill has bipartisan or majority party support, seeking additional support from executive-level policymakers, arranging expert witnesses to give testimony at committee hearings, and being ready to compromise through the amendatory process.

Berry (2003) suggests that administrative advocacy may be a particularly effective type of advocacy for human service nonprofits to be involved in because access comes easier at the local level, and nonprofits may wield more power in that sphere. Recognizing that many human service organizations have very limited resources and struggle to gain a seat at the table, he recommends that nonprofits think of what they have to

offer policymakers and capitalize on that. Local government needs human service organizations to administer needed programs and often turns to local service providers for information about the extent or severity of a problem. Developing a relationship with the local government officials overseeing services in the organization's area of expertise (homelessness, child welfare, domestic violence, etc.) can be a way to influence the rules and regulations that impact the agency's functioning as well as ensure that adequate funding is available and that emerging issues are addressed.

Other scholars (Schneider & Lester, 2001; Sherraden, Slosar, & Sherraden, 2002) have made similar arguments, pointing out that devolution has increased the power wielded by state-level decision makers, and that advocacy at the state level is considerably more accessible and less intimidating than federal-level advocacy. Geographically, it also makes coalition building easier because organizations can join with others who serve the same population, or who receive funding from the same local agency. Others have argued, however, that devolution has not led to increased access and that many nonprofits are finding it difficult to communicate with state-level officials (DeVita, 1999). Additionally, in areas with considerable federal oversight, the power of state-level officials to change regulations may be limited.

Whether at the local, state, or federal level, influencing the regulation-writing process can be a highly effective way of influencing social welfare policy. This often-overlooked point is in line with

research on policy implementation, which has argued that implementation details, often worked out in the regulatory process by administrators, not legislators, is key to how policy is experienced at the ground level (Brodkin, 1990). To do this effectively, Hoefer and Ferguson (2007) argue that advocates must enter the regulation-writing process early, avoid conflict, and have access to key players. Hoefer (2001) has also proposed several other tactics for shaping regulation, based on the activities of influential interest groups in Washington, D.C., such as bringing current regulations to executive branch attention or suggesting changes to proposed regulations to the issuing agency.

Conclusion

Regardless of the tactics used or level of resources available, advocacy is an important skill for managers in the human services. Whether motivated by social justice concerns, professional values, or organizational self-interest, managers who involve their organizations in advocacy will raise the profile of their organization as well as that of their clients. Managers of human service organizations play a vital mediating role between policy and practice. Increased participation in policy advocacy has the potential to improve both, resulting in improved organizational health and more stable funding streams, while helping to reduce the racial, economic, and social inequalities that are still so pervasive in our society.

ONLINE ADVOCACY RESOURCES

As well as a tool for conducting advocacy and mobilizing constituents, the Internet is a rich resource for information about how to carry out effective and legal advocacy and lobbying campaigns. Below is a nonexhaustive list of some of the most comprehensive sites.

Nonprofit Advocacy Information and Legal Information About Lobbying

- Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest: <http://www.clpi.org>
- OMB Watch: <http://www.ombwatch.org>
- Alliance for Justice: <http://www.afj.org>

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Leadership and Coalition Building

- Institute for Sustainable Communities Advocacy and Leadership Center: http://www.iscvt.org/what_we_do/advocacy_and_leadership_center/

Communication Strategies and Working With the Media

- The Spin Project: <http://www.spinproject.org>

Internet and Online Advocacy

- e.politics: <http://www.epolitics.com>
- Net Action: <http://www.netaction.org>

Foundations and Policy Advocacy

- National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy: <http://www.ncrp.org>
- Donors Forum of Illinois: <http://www.donorsforum.org>

Social Justice-Focused Policymaking

- The Praxis Project: <http://www.thepraxisproject.org>

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