



Advocacy basics

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Defining Advocacy

Advocacy is the science and art of persuading people to do what you want them to do. Usually this revolves around some area of policy or practice by state authorities, agencies or by other organisations. Inherently it is about making change happen, or sometimes stopping change from happening. Successful advocacy will often be multi-disciplinary, involving public policy research and development, public relations, lobbying, information and many conversations and meetings.

Although advocacy will sometimes involve conflict and can be quite aggressive, it is usually more effective to win people over through more subtle persuasion. Ideally, you want other people to co-own your issue and to work with you drive positive change.

A good approach is to separate advocacy into three parts. Understanding, planning and doing. These should be in sequence and are often circular. The doing part is the least important!

There is a good [guide and toolkit for advocacy](#), prepared by Plan International. This comes in several parts and is available in English, French and Spanish.

The change you want to see

Start with understanding **what** you really want to achieve and what a pathway to success might look like. You may have a great, long-term goal, such as every person with MS being offered a full suite of treatments, plus care and support for all their needs. Within this can you identify more specific priorities and some clear, realistic objectives? What are the gaps in treatment, care and support that have a major impact of people with MS? Realistically, how much might you achieve with a lot of work, with strong allies, over a few years? Think about stepping stones that take you towards your goal.

Then consider what evidence you need, both to prove the needs and gaps exist and to prove why the change you want to see is achievable, will meet needs well and is not too expensive. This may mean that you need to do research. This does not have to be published academic research, though higher quality research, perhaps done by independent experts, tends to be more influential.

You also need to understand the perspectives of the decision makers you are trying to influence. What are their motivations and pressures? Who influences them? From their



perspective as well as your own, **why** do gaps in treatment or care exist? **What** are the barriers to change? **How** will solutions work and what will the benefits be?

Join forces with others

Critical to the doing phase will be the allies you have on your side. These might be other interested organisations or influential people, or perhaps media partners. So if possible, involve them in your planning, so that they are also planning to work with and alongside you and they have a sense of shared ownership of your advocacy work. Try to think ahead. Many advocacy campaigns will take more than a year to achieve worthwhile results.



Mobilising your supporters can also take time, so try not to do too much too quickly. On the other hand, you will need to inspire people and maintain motivation and momentum, so you may need to think about some positive results that you can achieve early on and celebrate as well as planning for the longer term.

Your planning should identify who you need to influence and how to influence them, including thinking of who else you can get on your side that may have a closer relationship or are harder to ignore. Be willing to adapt your messages for different audiences. Neurologists will generally have a greater appetite for complexity than most politicians. An official in the finance Ministry will have different interests to an official in the health Ministry. If your campaigning includes involving people with MS or the general public, try not to over complicate things and be very clear about what you want people to do as part of the campaign – something that is easy to do, such as signing a petition, which is easy and makes people feel involved. If you want people to write letters or emails of support, help them by giving them a draft they can adapt.

Evaluate and adapt

You need to evaluate what you have done and are still going to do - and be willing to adapt. You may continue with your original plan, or you may make changes. The sequence of understanding, planning and doing should become a virtuous circle, not a straight line, especially if your advocacy goal is longer term. Remember to include your allies in your evaluation.

If you have done the understanding and planning phases well, then the doing part is much easier. Good advocacy is like preparing a great feast. The preparation and cooking is all important and takes a long time, requiring expertise. Eating the feast is the easy part! For people taking part, it should feel positive and it may even be fun. Above all, people should feel that they are making a difference.

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