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Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

Advocacy Campaigns that Work: A New Training Resource Based on Stories from the Field

By Steven Eppler-Epstein and Ellen Hemley

Steven Eppler-Epstein
*Executive Director,
Connecticut Legal Services
Vice Chairperson, Board of
Directors, Sargent Shriver
National Center on Poverty Law*

Connecticut Legal Services
62 Washington St.
Middletown, CT 06457
860.975.3909
Steve@ConnLegalServices.org

Ellen Hemley
*Vice President of
Training Programs*

Sargent Shriver National
Center on Poverty Law

Boston Office:
89 South St. Suite 407
Boston, MA 02111
617.379.3466
ehemley@povertylaw.org

Chicago Office:
50 E. Washington St. Suite 500
Chicago, IL 60602

Legal aid lawyers engage regularly in a wide range of public advocacy campaigns—from working to improve domestic violence laws, prevent Medicaid cuts, or ameliorate public housing conditions to dealing with safety threats in low-income communities. In recent years, in the wake of the IOLTA (Interest on Lawyers' Trust Accounts) collapse and federal funding uncertainty, many legal aid programs (both funded and not funded by the Legal Services Corporation) have requested increased funding from state legislatures and local governments to secure funding necessary to hold onto the staff members who do such important work for our clients. In all of these efforts, we work in formal or loosely organized coalitions with community-based organizations, social service agencies, private lawyers, and judges. Sometimes we lead these campaigns; at other times we are one of many partners working together toward a common goal. Regardless of the ultimate purpose, the overarching structure and strategy options for these myriad campaigns are the same.

The Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law offers a range of training programs on basic and advanced legal advocacy skills as well as training on policy and communications advocacy within the context of a community lawyering practice (Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law, Basic Lawyering Skills (n.d.), <http://bit.ly/1dtZXT2>; Case Planning and Discovery (n.d.), <http://bit.ly/1aWwSfe>; Negotiation Skills (n.d.), <http://bit.ly/1cISxsO>; Affirmative Litigation Training (n.d.), <http://bit.ly/16PRFag>; Community Lawyering (n.d.), <http://bit.ly/1geVrMo>). A training focused on public advocacy campaigns has been missing from our offerings, however. And, while some of us have had opportunities to share success stories (or cautionary tales) about our advocacy campaigns, we do not yet have a common framework or language for this aspect of our work. As a result, we cannot support experienced advocates or train newer advocates in how to develop and run effective public advocacy campaigns. The good news is that best practices for successful advocacy campaigns abound within the national legal aid community, and the skills for carrying out these best practices are teachable. Our goal therefore is to collect and synthesize these best practices from our colleagues around the country and present them in an accessible and organized framework.

We define a “public advocacy campaign” as a combination of coordinated strategies and actions designed to influence those who have the power to implement public policies and practices that benefit the clients and communities we serve. While the same principles apply to advocacy with private decision makers, such as large corporations, this public advocacy campaign focuses primarily on government decision makers.

The Shriver Center's new advocacy campaign training and best practices manual are built around the fundamental starting point of all campaigns, that to be successful we must enhance the influence that low-income communities, or their representatives, have in relation to a particular goal. As such, a campaign gains

influence through its deep understanding of four elements: “vision,” “targets,” “tools,” and “moments” of influence. The training focuses on skills toward success in each element.

- “Vision toward influence” means defining a goal and designing a message and a best path toward achieving that goal. While a successful campaign often can be adjusted as necessary, there must always be a clear and visible goal with detailed objectives that, if achieved, will enable the campaign to accomplish the goal. The training explores how, working in coalitions, advocates can create a vision that leads toward achievable results.
- “Targets of influence” means those who make (or can have a direct impact on) the decision you are influencing. The training explores how to identify and choose among targets of influence so that advocacy is directed efficiently and effectively.
- “Tools of influence” means the skills and strategies that you must deploy to achieve your goals. The tools of influence include people (your leaders, networks, allies, and experts) and methods of communication (both the message and the skills in using all types of communication from meetings to media to mass-mail campaigns).
- “Moments of influence” means the best opportunities for your network to deliver your message to the targets. Some of these moments are events that are planned—and there is both science and art to preparing and carrying out these events. Others are less expected but can still be planned for and taken advantage of strategically.

If you have had successful advocacy campaigns, you have worked successfully in all of these elements. In building this new advocacy campaign training, we will be reaching out to you, across the country, to glean your stories and gain your wisdom. Or, even better, e-mail us now to tell us about your successes and strategies as part of this national effort.



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A newly designed and enhanced digital edition of CLEARINGHOUSE REVIEW: JOURNAL OF POVERTY LAW AND POLICY, premiering in 2014 and superseding our print edition, will deliver more timely and engaging information on best practices and cutting-edge approaches to legal advocacy on behalf of people living in poverty. The digital edition is searchable and printable.

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