



Guidelines for Advocacy

What is advocacy?

Advocacy consists of purposive efforts to change specific existing or proposed policies or practices on behalf of or with a specific client or group of clients. An advocacy strategy is a broad approach toward change and may involve a plan of action that encompasses multiple tactics targeting the specific entities that need to change.

Guiding Questions

1. With what client group are you concerned?
2. What is the specific client problem or need of concern?
3. In what geographic jurisdiction does the client group reside?
4. How many people have the problem and who are they?
5. How long has the specific need existed?
6. What are the consequences of the problem for individuals, families, communities and society?
7. Why is this issue undesirable?
8. What ideas, beliefs, attitudes, values, or myths support the existence of the problem or get in the way of change?
9. Have any communities found ways to prevent the problem effectively?
10. Are there successful interventions to help people with the problem or need?

Guidelines for Advocacy Practice

1. The plight of clients requires vigorous representation
2. Effective advocates use multiple techniques to hear their clients.
3. Successful advocates target specific policies or practices for change.
4. Effective advocates closely map the decision systems responsible for targeted policies and practices.
5. Effective advocates recast larger problems into solvable pieces.
6. Successful advocates propose concrete solutions to the client problems they address.
7. Effective advocates utilize several strategies, tactics, and skills simultaneously and sequentially.
8. Successful advocates remain aware of and actively counter negative stereotypes about clients and distorted beliefs about problems and proposals.
9. Effective advocates use the least conflict-producing tactics necessary to accomplish necessary to accomplish a goal.
10. Effective advocates are culturally aware and respectful as they relate to advocacy colleagues, clients, and decision makers.
11. Effective advocates place a very high priority on impacting budgets.
12. Effective advocates closely monitor the implementation of changed policies and practices.

Sample Advocacy Activities

1. Arguing for better services
2. Pushing for increased clients' rights in the agency
3. Negotiating with agencies
4. Giving testimony to decision makers
5. Lobbying policymakers
6. Litigating or seeking legal remedies
7. Representing clients in an administrative hearing
8. Influencing administrative rule making
9. Teaching advocacy skills to clients to solve a problem
10. Educating clients on their rights
11. Educating the public on an issue
12. Monitoring agency's performance
13. Organizing coalitions
14. Influencing media coverage on an issue
15. Mobilizing constituent support

Self-empowering reminders

1. Focus on your clients, what they are experiencing, and what they're not getting. Their unmet needs give legitimacy to your efforts.
2. You don't have to do it all yourself.
3. The fear that you'll make a mistake is a good reminder of how important the issue is.
4. The only way to avoid mistakes is to do nothing. The same approach is used to maintain the status quo.
5. Advocacy is an unfolding process. You do not need to have all the answers before you start.
6. Anxiety is created by trying to make decisions too soon and before you have the information you need for those decisions. Move forward and many solutions will be obvious.
7. Excitement and anxiety feel very similar. Label those feelings in your stomach as excitement.
8. You absolutely have the right to question the system for your clients.
9. Don't assume the target system will resist.
10. Think of the outcome of advocacy as victory for your clients *and* for the target agency (a win-win scenario).

Source:

Ezell, M. (2001). *Advocacy in human services*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole/Wadsworth.