

Identifying Your Audiences

Advocacy is about convincing someone – an institution, a person and in most cases a combination of many – to support a change you want. Effective advocacy must conduct a careful analysis of who those audiences are, where they stand on your objective, and what is most likely to move them to your side.

I. Two Kinds of Audiences: Authority and Influence

Effective advocacy efforts have to identify and appeal to two different kinds of audiences:

Who has the authority: First, who has the actual authority to deliver the change you are advocating for? What institution? Where in that institution? Is that authority in one person's hands or many?

Who else has influence? Who are the other actors that will influence how those with authority decide their position on the issue? This can include: other institutions or interest groups, the media, and the public at large. Your advocacy strategy also needs to take into account how you will deal with and influence the opinions and actions of these other actors.

II. Where do those with the Authority Stand on the Issue?

Effective advocacy also begins, not with where you wish those with authority stand on the issue but where they *actually do* stand. If they have not already taken the action that you are advocating that they take, why not? Is it because?

- They aren't aware or convinced of the problem?
- They haven't been presented with a workable solution?
- Budget constraints don't provide the resources required?
- They have ideological or policy objections to what you are advocating?
- There are political pressures coming from an opposite direction?

Understanding the reasons behind their stance on the issue is essential to making a strong advocacy case to those authorities.

III. Authorities Fall into Three Categories

Authorities generally fall into three categories and your strategy toward them depends on which:

Champions

These are the people on the "inside" of the institutions you need to influence who are not only on your side but are solidly on your side. They can help champion your objective on the inside by helping you understand the dynamics and opinions in play and by making the case to their colleagues. Advocates help them do that by making sure they have solid information and also support from the outside.

Fence Sitters

These are the authorities that could go either way on your issue and generally these are the most important targets for any advocacy effort. Knowing where they stand, what their concerns are, and what pressures they are under is key. Effective advocacy mixes a variety of tactics and arguments to help them decide your way.

Opponents

There are some authorities and actors who are against you and will remain against you no matter what you do. In these cases the important thing is to be prepared to refute the arguments they make and to weaken the clout and influence they will have in the decision making process.

IV. Strategies for Persuasion

Connections you can use to get to them: Who do you know, or could know, that has special influence with them?

Arguments & information you can use to persuade them: What arguments and information is likely to work on them, even if it isn't what most motivates you?

Tactics to weaken any opposition: Is there anyone pushing from the other side? If so, how do you diminish their clout?