

Building Advocacy Partnerships

Effective advocacy is about strength and often that strength comes from building a set of diverse partners who join with you. On the other hand, advocacy partnerships and alliances can be tricky, fraught with opportunities for misunderstanding or conflict. Like all else in advocacy work, partnerships should be formed and maintained strategically.

I. Why Advocacy Partnerships are Important

Advocacy partnerships offer advocacy efforts a variety of very important benefits. Some of these include:

Expanded Expertise

Good advocacy needs a mix of knowledge to be effective. Building partnerships can piece together knowledge about: the issue involved, the decision making process involved, financial or budget analysis, working with the media, how to engage the public, and many other topics of important to the efforts success.

Broader Connections and Influence

Advocacy partnerships also bring together a variety of different connections and relationships – to authorities and decision makers, journalists, organizations, experts, and others.

Strength in Diversity

The more diverse an advocacy effort is the more powerful it will be. Partnerships bring together people with different points of view and different appeals to the decision makers and other audiences involved.

Builds Advocacy Capacity for the Future

Strong advocacy efforts are also extremely important "schools in the art of advocacy". Through partnerships, experienced groups and people offer a chance for less-experienced ones to learn how advocacy is done. This helps build a strong and ongoing advocacy capacity for children's rights on into the future.

II. Who do you Want with You in Advocacy Partnerships?

When you reach out to establish advocacy partnerships, there are different types of partners that are key. These include:

- *People who know the issue well:* Who can offer testimony, help write materials, and offer technical guidance on developing proposals.
- *People or organizations who are connected to the process:* Who can help direct your advocacy strategy in an intelligent and informed way and also help connect the advocacy effort more closely to the process.
- *People or organizations with advocacy experience:* Who can bring that expertise to your effort and also serve as teachers and advisors to those with less experience.
- *Organizations that have some political clout:* Who can open doors and make the case to those hardest to reach.

III. Structuring Effective Advocacy Partnerships

Advocacy partnerships offer up almost as many challenges as they do opportunities. Here are three important ingredients to making those partnerships work well:

The Right Amount of Structure

Effective advocacy partnerships have just the amount of structure they need to function and no more. On the one hand a certain amount of structure – set meetings, clear tasks, etc. – is important to functioning. But every added element of structure – a name, formal decision making, dues, etc. – adds work, time and the potential for disagreements.

Clear Communication

Advocacy partnerships need clear communication, about their goals, their strategies, their shared work, and all of the other elements involved in an advocacy effort.

Leadership

Finally, leadership is key. Effective advocacy leaders listen to their partners and help find common ground. They keep the effort on strategic track and they provide a clear external voice to other institutions and actors.