

**TOP TEN TIPS
ON
HOW TO INFLUENCE POLICYMAKERS & THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS**

1. UNDERSTAND THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT.

- Research the treatment of persons with disabilities (such as exclusion, segregation, and automatic referral by generic system to disability system).
- Recognize the intensity of feelings by persons with disabilities regarding why it is critical to develop new or modify existing policy based on historical treatment.
- Become knowledgeable about the current policy framework and its strengths and inadequacies.
- Use understanding of the historical context to explain the nature and scope of needed changes to current policy.

2. UNDERSTAND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT.

- Determine the extent to which disability policy is partisan or bi-partisan.
- Identify the key players and the role of the policymaker you are trying to influence.
- Determine the nature and extent of the controversy raised by a particular issue.
- Determine the existence/strength of any cross-disability coalitions.
- Determine the strength of the “opposition.”

3. ARTICULATE THE VALUES, PRINCIPLES, AND GOALS OF THE DISABILITY POLICY.

- Recognize the difference between the old vs. new paradigm of disability policy. (The old paradigm needs to “fix” the “defective” person with a disability vs. the new paradigm which recognizes that disability is a natural part of the human experience and provides the necessary supports, services, and accommodations – civil rights model.)
- Recognize the goals of disability policy – equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency including:
 - Equality of opportunity – individualization, inclusion, meaningful opportunity
 - Full participation – empowerment, self-determination, informed choice at individual and systems level
 - Independent living – skills, services, and supports
 - Economic self-sufficiency – training, education, assistance and supports

4. UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF POLICYMAKERS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS.

- Self-interest – reelection, power, status among peers and interest groups

- Time – balancing priorities
- Trust – importance of developing long-term relationships
- Viable policy options – and data and other supports justifying options

5. UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF THE LEGISLATOR’S STAFF TO:

- Promote and protect the boss.
- Help in sorting through an avalanche of inputs to determine what is real and what is posturing.
- Help to develop assumptions and present fiscal and program estimates.
- Help in identifying the key players.
- Help in developing viable policy options, drafting bills, report language, floor statements, and/or speeches.
- Help in developing a political strategy.

6. UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR AND THE ROLE OF AN ORGANIZED COALITION IN EXERCISING POWER OVER THE POLICYMAKING PROCESS.

- Composition of the coalition (cross disability, consumers and providers, non-traditional groups that reach beyond the disability community)
- Cohesion
- Synergy
- Skilled individuals performing varied tasks working together
- Leadership (policy entrepreneur)
- Responsibility (carrying out the agreed upon tasks)

7. UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR A STRATEGIC PLAN.

- Planned spontaneity (passion, anger, frustration are necessary but are not sufficient to effectuate change – one needs to think strategically and act on the basis of a plan).
- Identify the prize (short and long term goals and objectives).
- Decide on the overall strategy and then determine how a particular tactic, meeting with a policymaker, fits in.
- Identify the key policymakers who will assume leadership roles.
- Control the dynamics of the debate – frame the issue to garner a board-based support and to create an aura of inevitability.
- Develop favorable program fiscal estimates.
- Present viable policy options based on research, program and fiscal estimates.

8. UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES THAT ARE TIED TO POLICY OBJECTIVES.

- Telling personal stories in isolation does not work.
- Need to decide on the policy objective and how to frame the issue and then tie the personal story to the policy objectives and policy options.

- 9. UNDERSTAND THAT WHO DELIVERS THE MESSAGE IS AS IMPORTANT – AND OFTEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE MESSAGE.**
- Strategically select the spokespersons that will have maximum influence over policymakers.
 - Ensure that the message is presented in a manner that recognizes the needs of the particular policymaker and/or their staff.
- 10. RECOGNIZE YOUR STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS.**
- Keep your eye on the prize – put your ego aside.
 - Don't agree to a policy option when you are not fully knowledgeable about the option.
 - Don't agree to a policy option on behalf of others who you may not represent.

(Originally prepared by Bobby Silverstein, Director. Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy. Washington, D.C. Adapted 8-2007.)