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# Building an Advocacy Team

In many of your congregations, you may already have a social witness ministry, a social justice committee or a collection of people dedicated to justice work. The Office of Public Witness invites you to organize and formalize a Grassroots Advocacy Team to engage your congregants and community members in the creation of public policy and the advancement of a prophetic agenda to benefit all God’s people and creation.

The power of Advocacy Teams comes from the strong relationships we build with Congress. You will build an ongoing relationship with your members of Congress. You will learn how to work with the media to see the news you want. You will foster a network of advocates in your community. You will help your members of Congress become champions for peace and justice.

**What does an Advocacy Team do?**

As a member of an Advocacy Team, you commit to having a relationship with your team, your members of Congress, and The Office of Public Witness over a period of at least a year. We support your team with action alerts, team building and organizing resources, and issue briefs through out the year.

## Building a Team and Identifying Leadership

Three components seem basic to any group having staying power:

1. A named leadership team
2. A plan of action
3. A regularly used communication system for both supporters and the broader community.

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| **What:** | It should be a group of 7-15 people that each commit to a specified period of stewardship for the Grassroots Advocacy Team. This working group makes routine decisions and sets directions and vision. |
| **Why:** | Having the leadership be named allows those names to be made public which makes the group accessible to potential supporters and people in need. It also allows the group to have a decision making process. It helps define for leaders what is expected of them so that they are better able to contribute to the work of the group. |
| **Who:** | It is important that the right people are on a leadership team. There are many perspectives on who is ‘right’ for the job. Does the person share the values of the group? Does the person function well in meetings? Some people hate meetings despite their dedication to the group, other people enjoy meetings; the leadership team needs folks that can cope in a meeting setting. Can the person make a time commitment? (If the person is wearing too many other hats, this might not be the best time for them to take a turn on the leadership team.) Is the person willing to make decisions? Is the person willing to cooperate? Do they have the specific skills needed for the role they are being asked to play? |
| **How:** | Consider writing job descriptions for the various roles, as you would in hiring someone for a job. These can be simple, but should clearly state what is expected of each member, so they can decide if they’re up to the task. You might want to define the length of term for the position and include recruiting new leadership in the responsibilities of each person. |

The next question is how do you find these folks when everyone seems so busy? Rule number one – don’t beg. Take the time to have enough conversations to find the folks where this commitment matches where they are in their lives. Many other folks might be honored to be considered but need to be supported in understanding what the job would require and being honest if it fits in with their current life. People who decline now might be able to start making the space for a future year’s turn at leadership. Start by brainstorming a list of prospects. Divide the list of prospects up and set up formal times to meet with these people and discuss the group, its history, its potential and what it would mean to commit to being on a leadership team. Enter into the one on one meetings with a friendly timeline to allow for them to happen. It would be good to have a first meeting date set for folks who say ‘yes’ to plan around. Following up with a letter of confirmation as a reminder of the meeting helps.

1. Brainstorm names of prospects
2. Divide who will meet with which prospect
3. Conduct meetings
4. Host meeting with new recruits who sign on

## How to Conduct a One-on-One

*Adapted from a Training for Change resource By Jethro Heiko, Action Mill (actionmill.com)*

**Goals of One-On-Ones:**

The general purpose of the one-on-one is to build and strengthen a relationship. Other goals include:

* Setting and modeling boundaries that enable civic and community relationships to flourish (e.g. it is not that you should not be friends with the people you organize with but the goal is not to create friends, it is to create a strong organization, a strong community, a strong movement);
* Modeling the values of your organization (of generosity, honesty, resourcefulness, for example) – these should be lived throughout all your interactions with those you interact with;
* Modeling self-care and respectful ways of listening and sharing to create healthy relationship amongst people as well as between people and the challenging work of changing the world.

**The Set Up**

The specific reason for why you request to meet with someone should be known and shared with the person you want to meet with. Like all requests the person can negotiate their response, they may say no, yes ("of course") or modify or ask questions that help strengthen the purpose of the meeting, and the relationship. It is important to be as clear with yourself as you can before making the request and to be open and respectful of the needs and time constraints of the person you hope to meet with. Once you are clear about the purpose as well as your hoped-for outcomes of the meeting choose the most appropriate way to set up the meeting. This is often based on the relationship you already have with the person, are they someone that prefers setting things up in person, by phone, by email, through their social networking site? If your connection to the person is through a recommendation of someone else can the recommender introduce the two of you through email, or in person or by phone? Or ask the recommender how best to make the request based on their experience-would the person prefer a call or email, for example? The request should be short and clear and should include how much time you expect the meeting to last. Most people are okay with a 30 minute to one hour meeting and some one on ones could take place by meeting for breakfast or lunch, it all depends on the relationship that exists. The same is true for where to meet, a suggestion is to meet where it is convenient for the person and for you. The key is to set and manage the expectations for what the meeting is all about, what will be discussed, etc. Make sure you have ways to contact each other in the event that something comes up and the plans need to change.

**The Meeting**

This is not a scripted meeting although you should come prepared to ask the questions that fit with the expected outcomes you have discussed with the person you are meeting with.

Here are some sample questions that can be useful at one-on-one meetings:

* How did you get involved in this issue?
* What concerns in the world are keeping you up at night?
* Have you taken any action on your biggest concerns? Why or why not?
* What life experiences compelled you to make change in the world?
* What is one story that exemplifies why this work is important to you?
* What is a lesson that someone important to you taught you?
* What do you hope to accomplish in the short term, long term?
* What organizations are you involved with, if any?
* Who else do you think I should talk with?
* What do you think it would take to win?
* What kind of support do you need to accomplish your goals?
* What are special interests or skills you could contribute?

There are an unlimited number of questions you can ask to get the conversation going and to keep it focused. In general, questions are best when they open up opportunities for learning, “how”, “what” questions for example open up opportunities for story-telling. Questions that can be answered with a yes or no are not bad questions but try to mix them in appropriately to gain clarity or start a new conversation. Always remember the purpose of the meeting which is to build a stronger relationship to advance the effort, so although focus is important so is staying relaxed, honest and present.

**Follow-up**

Timely follow-up to one-on-ones is important and it is also where note-taking can be very helpful. Follow-up in the most appropriate manner and in the way that was agreed upon (if it was agreed upon) at the meeting. Follow-through on any tasks that you agreed to on your end as well. You have invested a lot of time in the one-on-one and the quality and timeliness of your follow through will often determine whether or not it was worth it. Follow-ups also should include specific next steps and deadlines if any were agreed to and helpful reminders along the way.

## Leadership Development

*From the leadership development principles of Showing Up for Racial Justice*

*“I have always thought what is needed is the development of people who are*

*interested not in being leaders as much as in developing the leadership of others.”*

- Ella Baker

Principles of Leadership Development:

* Pathway to Power – Develop structure that can move your target community into a leadership tract (ie: from supporters to base members to leaders).  This includes creating an organizational identity.
* Relationship Building– Through personal relationships we build trust, respect, and common values. Relationships are the backbone of organizing.
* Education– Provide educational training that serves to heighten analysis that is relevant and develop skills that can be applied.
* On the Ground – Create space for members to try and succeed at tasks.  Provide members with roles that are both meaningful (ie: serve the organizational goals & further their development) and realistic (ie: meet them where they are at).
* Reflection – Be mindful of ongoing follow-up, instill confidence and encourage a practice of self-reflection. Be sure to give recognition and celebrate growth.  Don’t be afraid to provide critical feedback.
* Mentorship – Don’t be afraid to set expectations, guard against tailism (ie: holding back your political ideas & tasks, as a means to avoid conflict) and commandism (ie: pushing too hard the groups political ideas and certain tasks). Be transparent about the supervision/mentorship.

## Meeting Facilitation

*From “Meeting Facilitation: The No Magic Method” by Berit Lakey*

Meetings are occasions when people come together to get something done, whether it is sharing information or making decisions. They may be good, bad, or indifferent.

Some of the ingredients of good meetings are:

* Commonly understood goals
* A clear process for reaching those goals
* An awareness that people come with their personal pre-occupations and feelings as well as an interest in the subject at hand
* A sense of involvement and empowerment, people feeling that the decisions are their decisions, that they are able to do what needs doing.

While there is no foolproof way to insure successful meetings, there are a number of guidelines that will go a long way toward helping groups to meet both joyfully and productively. Most people can learn how to facilitate a good meeting, but it does take some time and attention. The more people within a group who are aware of good group process skills, the easier the task of the facilitator and the more satisfactory the meeting.  A facilitator is not quite the same as a leader or a chairperson, but more like a clerk in a Quaker meeting. A facilitator accepts responsibility to help the group accomplish a common task: to move through the agenda in the time available and to make necessary decisions and plans for Implementation.  A facilitator makes no decisions for the group, but suggests ways that will help the group to move forward. He or she works in such a way that the people present at the meeting are aware that they are in charge, that it is their business that is being conducted, and that each person has a role to play.  It is important to emphasize that the responsibility of the facilitator is to the group and its work rather than to the individuals within the group. Furthermore, a person with a high stake in the issues discussed will have a more difficult task functioning as a good facilitator.

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**Agenda Planning**

If at all possible, plan the agenda before this meeting. It is easier to modify it later than to start from scratch at the beginning of the meeting. If very few agenda items are known before the meeting starts, try to anticipate by thinking about the people who will be there and what kind of process will be helpful to them.

In the agenda include:

Something to gather people, to bring their thoughts to the present, to make them recognize each other's presence (singing, silence, brief mention of good things that have happened to people lately, etc.)

Agenda review—it's a good idea to have the agenda written on large sheets of newsprint or on a blackboard, so that everybody can see it. By reviewing the agenda the facilitator can give the participants a chance to modify the proposed agenda and then to contract to carry it out.

Main items—if more than one item needs to be dealt with it is important to set priorities.

* If at all possible, start with something, which can be dealt with reasonably easily. This will give the group a sense of accomplishment and energy
* The more difficult or lengthier items, or those of most pressing importance, come next. If there are several, plan to have quick breaks between them to restore energy and attention (just a stretch in place, a rousing song, and a quick game.)
* A big item may be broken into several issues and discussed one at a time to make it more manageable. Or it may be helpful to suggest a process of presenting the item with background information and clarification, breaking into small groups for idea sharing and making priorities, and  then returning to the main group for discussion.
* Finish with something short and easy to provide a sense of hope for next time.

Evaluation—serves several purposes: to provide a quick opportunity for people to express their feelings about the proceedings and thus to provide a sense of closure to the experience; and to learn to have better meetings in the future. Estimate the time needed for each item and put it on the agenda charts.

This will:

* Indicate to participants the relative weights of the items.
* Help participants tailor their participation to the time available
* Give a sense of the progress of the meeting.

The tone of a meeting is usually set on the  beginning. It's important to start on a note of confidence and energy and with the recognition that those present are people, not just roles and functions. Sometimes singing will do this— especially in large gatherings— or a quick sharing of good things which have happened to individual people lately. The time it takes is repaid by the contribution it makes to a relaxed and upbeat atmosphere where participants are encouraged to be real with each other.

**Grassroots Advocacy Team Meeting Sample Agenda**

**Prior to the Meeting**

* **Spread the word!** Invite people to come, ask them to commit to joining the meeting, and follow up with them beforehand to confirm. Think about how to invite a diverse group that includes people from communities most impacted by unjust public policy.
* **Print out and bring sign-in sheets.**
* **Designate someone to take notes during the meeting.**
* **Bring a concrete idea for an action** that your group will take the following week. It can be an in district meeting, a joint OP Ed, or a tweet storm. That way, you can recruit meeting attendees to participate!

**Welcome and Introductions**

* **Welcome everyone and outline the goals for the meeting**, including:
* Get to know each other if you are not already members of the same congregation
* Commit to the values that will guide your work in the coming months and years; and
* Plan and commit to your first action.
* **Write your agenda**
* **Have people in attendance briefly introduce themselves and** explain what motivated them to get involved. The amount of time you have for this will vary depending on the size of your group. If your group is large, you may want to ask everyone to keep their introduction to one sentence. Model the type of introduction you are looking for by going first.

**Volunteers for Roles**

This part of the meeting will vary a lot depending on how big your group is and who is in the room. The goal is to figure out **how you will divide roles and responsibilities** among your group.

We recommend the following roles:

* Overall group coordination (1-2 people): Responsible for scheduling group meetings, coordinating communication within your group, and leading the group in planning and strategy for local, defensive congressional action.
* Media/social media lead (1 person): Responsible for coordinating your group’s outreach to the media and presence on social media (i.e. Twitter, Facebook).
* News monitoring lead (1 person): Responsible for tracking news about your Members of Congress and any major Congressional issues/decisions.
* Congressional office tracking (1-2 people): Responsible for tracking your Member of Congress’ schedule, events, and upcoming votes. This will be essential to scheduling your group’s visits to your Member of Congress’ office, attendance at town hall events, etc.
* Tech and Inclusion help (1-2 people): If there are members of your group who may need extra help with internal communications like Facebook invites or emails, appoint a helpful person to make sure they’re in the loop.

This is also a good time to talk about the different ways that group members can contribute to advocacy efforts: attending events, recording events, asking questions, making calls, hosting meetings, engaging on social media, writing op-eds for local papers, etc. Ask each person in attendance how they would like to contribute. Have your note-taker take good notes during this section. Whenever possible, have people commit to a specific action at a specific time (e.g. I will write an op-ed next week about healthcare).

**Adopt a Means of Communication**

You need a way of reaching everyone in your group in order to coordinate actions. This can be a Facebook group, a Google group, a Slack team, an email list, a phone tree—whatever people are most comfortable with.

**Commit to Action**

* **Set a time and date for a specific action** that your group will take the following week. It’s a good idea to come to the meeting with something in mind so that you can actively recruit people to attend. Attendees may have additional ideas, and that’s great! Depending on the size of your group, you can decide on one or you can organize multiple actions.
* We suggest that new Grassroots Advocacy Groups **make a plan to visit the offices of their Members of Congress, introduce themselves as members of the PC(USA) and begin to build the relationship**.
* **Select someone who will be the lead coordinator** for the action. For the first action, this may be you! But in the future, you may want to designate a group member as the lead on each action. This person will ensure that everything runs smoothly the day of your event. You may also want a media spokesperson for each action.
* **Sign up group members to attend the next action(s).** Ask a clear yes or no question: will you attend our visit to Congressman Bob’s office at 3pm on Tuesday, January 10th? Write down everyone’s name who volunteers. If many people don’t, ask the group why and try to solve the problem. Your group will only have an impact through action.
* Make sure you **get everyone’s contact information** so that you can follow up with a reminder the day before the action.

**After the Meeting**

* **Send a message thanking everyone** for attending. Remind them about the upcoming action.
* **Ask group members to recruit additional people** to join your group. If each member found one more person to join you would immediately double the size of your group!